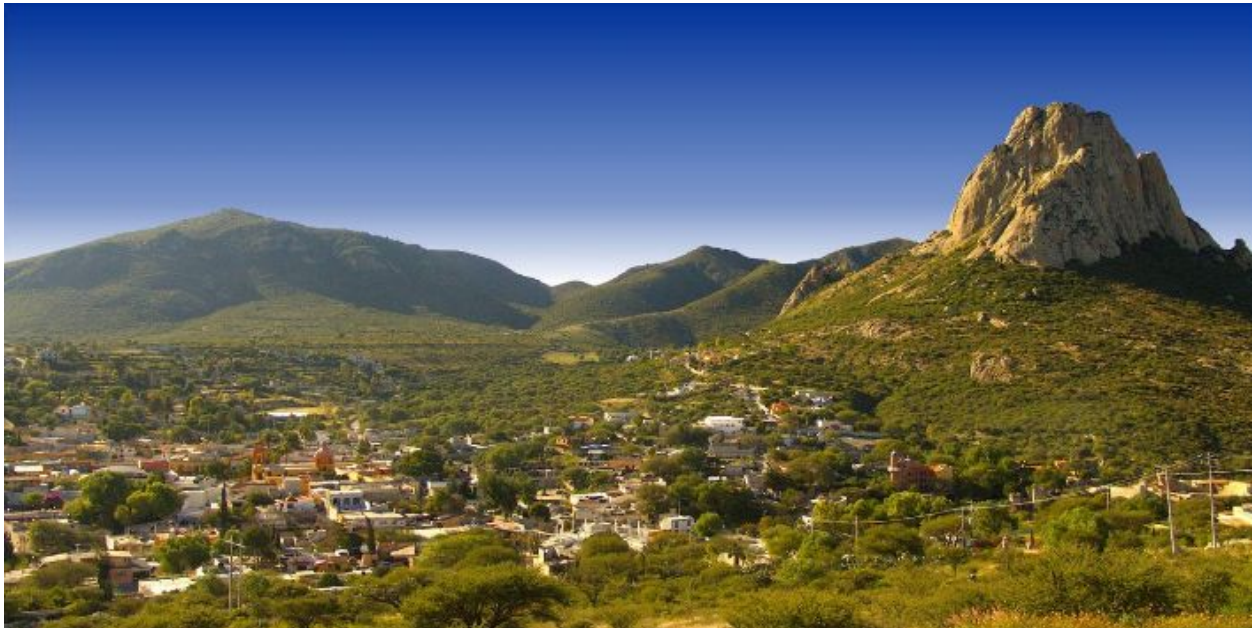




Bernal - Town of Mystery  
Carlos Garcia Calzada



When I think of the beautiful town we live in, a town that has been part of Mexico's history since its very start, it occurs to me that reducing all I could say to these few pages is a tall order. However, I will make a real effort to brief!



The small town where we live has about 4,000 people, and its history began back in 1647. Today I will share with you not just some of the natural beauty of the area, but also stories of the history and mystery that inform many of the beliefs that draw pilgrims to our region.

The 17th century inhabitants were the Otomíes-Chichimecas, who were conquered by the Spaniards. Despite its 360 years, the population of this village has not grown, but the people have maintained deep-rooted customs, traditions, festivals, and their own way of life.

La Peña de Bernal is the most striking piece of the landscape, and the third tallest natural monolith in the world. Many people make pilgrimages to the highest hikeable point on this monolith,



which is a church about halfway up, which belongs to the Municipality of Ezequiel Montes. Bordering to the east is the state of Hidalgo, to the north, Cadereyta, to the south, Tequisquiapan, and to the West are the municipalities of Colon and Toliman. The distance from Queretaro City to Ezequiel Montes is approximately 63 kilometers. Geologists claim that in mass, La Peña de Bernal is second to Ayer's rock in Australia, and in height, third behind the Rock of Gibraltar and Rio de Janeiro's Sugar Loaf.

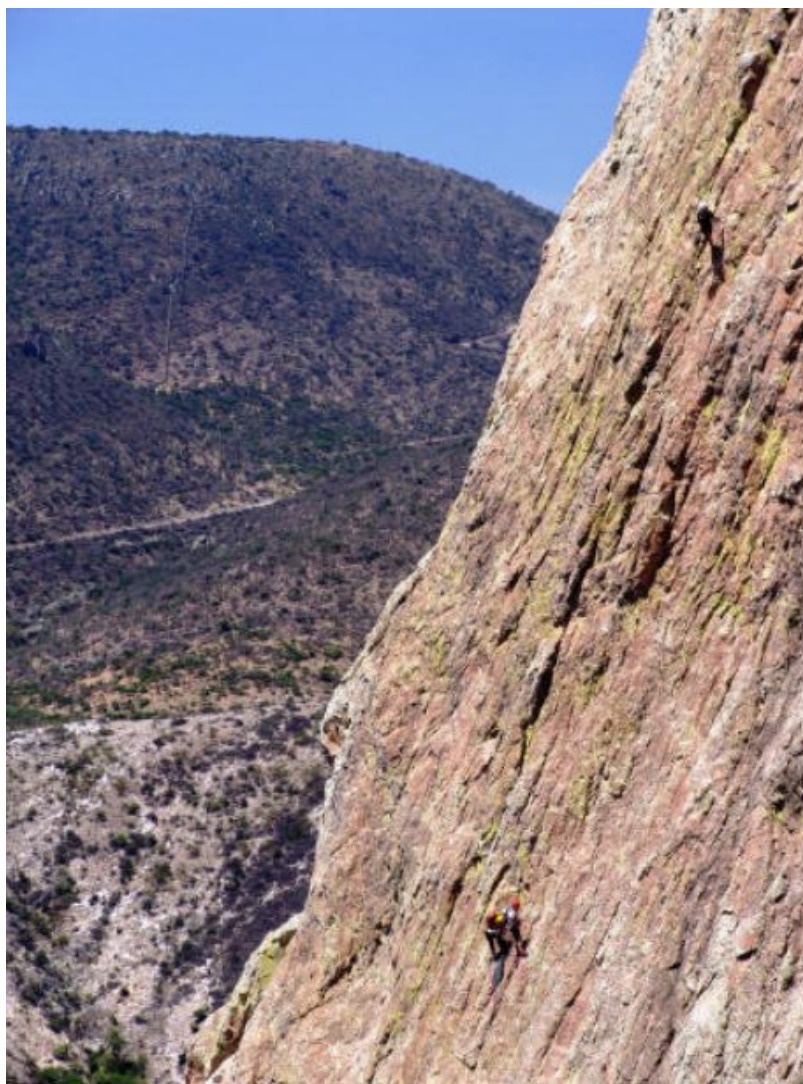


From in front of the Iglesia de San Sebastián in Bernal, the Peña provides the perfect backdrop to the bright oranges and yellows of the church. In fact, it is hard to find a spot in Bernal where the Peña doesn't provide a dramatic backdrop for a building, street, square or other scene.

The rock itself is inspiring enough to beckon climbers and hikers. The walk up to its halfway point is a challenging one that takes an hour and a half.

Continuing on to the top, however, is

only for serious rock climbers. Real experts take a completely different route and can be seen as spots of color hanging by threads on a sheer vertical face, making their way to the top piton by piton. The hike to the



halfway point is hot and dry, but every few hundred yards, an enterprising burro owner has enlisted his animal to supply an ice-filled cooler of bottled water and soda for sale to the thirsty hikers. Once at the halfway point (the destination for the more recreational tourist) one can observe the distinct browns and greens near the base of the rock blending together as the valleys stretch north toward San Luis Potosi and south toward

Pachuca. A small capilla, or chapel, barely large enough for one person to enter and kneel, nestles in a niche against a rock wall. Waiting in the

line that forms and stepping inside one see a tiny altar covered in flowers and lighted candles brought by the devoted.

On March 21, the Vernal Equinox, a different sort of festival occurs. Thousands of new-age believers, dressed all in white trimmed with red kerchiefs, gather early in the morning around the base of the Peña, absorbing the energy emanating from its crystal core. The residents have adapted to these outsiders in pragmatic ways, creating friendly restaurants, making tasty sweets, and developing a crafts industry to produce high quality wool and hand sewn lace.

For these visitors, Bernal is the center of a six-pointed star known as Solomon's Seal or the Philosopher's Diamond. It is believed that the points of the star are 44 kilometers away from the center in Bernal, in El Marques (the state of Querétaro), San Juan del Rio (Querétaro), Tecozautla (Hidalgo), San Joaquin (Querétaro), Peñamiller (Querétaro), and San Jose Iturbide (Guanajuato). According to believers, each peak corresponds to a specific vibration that relates to a concept, a color, and a crystal.



Living in the semi-desert zone of the state of Querétaro in central Mexico, the Otomí-Chichimeca people have developed a range of traditions that express a unique relationship with their local topography and ecology. Their

cultural environment is dominated by a symbolic triangle formed by the Zamorano and Frontón hills and the Bernal rock. It is to these sacred



hills that people make annual pilgrimages bearing crosses to pray for water and

divine protection, venerate their ancestors and celebrate their communal identity and continuity. Other community festivities throughout the year make up a calendar of rituals centered on water (a dangerously scarce element in this climate) and dedicated to the endurance of the Otomí-Chichimeca people. The rituals often occur in intimate family chapels dedicated to ancestors or in chimales, temporary but impressive reed structures with leaf roofs built as an offering, an emblem of endurance and a symbol of vitality and belonging. The relationship between spiritual culture and physical space is influential on the art of the region, including religious images, murals, dance and music, and the traditions that embody it are central components of the cultural identity of the community.

### "Las Animitas"

This chapel, also known as the Animitas, dates from the 18th century and was built in honor of all souls in purgatory. Its attractive design is due to the small size of





the atrium and altar. Next to it, there is an open-air theater and a park where visitors can rest and admire the surroundings.

### "El Castillo"

This regal-type property, built in the 1600's, is one of the most important in the political history of Bernal. Its front tower has a beautiful clock originally from



Germany, which was placed here to mark the beginning of the twentieth century. Currently, this building houses the offices of the Municipal Delegation.

### "San Sebastian y Los Concheros"

The picture in the upper right of the next page was taken in front of the Baroco Church. The atrium bursts with color: several groups of Concheros are jumping and whirling in brilliant plumed headdresses, playing their elemental chords on inlaid lute-like instruments. Oblivious

of the audience, the dance goes forward with sharp precision, with lowered eyes and body both relaxed and alert. Their instrument, La Concha, gives the dance its name. According to Los Chonceros, the performers, the dance was a part of the local culture before the Spanish Conquest.



When making a pilgrimage to these sites, it is said one faces a change in consciousness which leads to the awakening of the "true identity."

Peña de Bernal includes all manner of prehistoric art and sculptures, including apes, dogs, horses, lions, snakes, elephants, eagle, jaguar, walrus and turtle, among many other animals. Also carved on the stone are human figures, the male figures are similar to primates, but the women and children figures are very similar to the current human image. Also carved on La Peña are a multitude of symbols and codes awaiting to be decrypted.

The longevity of the inhabitants of Bernal is widely known. This has been attributed to many different resources: water flowing from inside the earth, the pure air, the large content of silicon dioxide, and the abundance of precious metals lying inside this land, to name a few.



However, people speak of unusual phenomena that often occur in Bernal: rare lights, UFOs, strange sounds, and celestial fireballs, among many other "curiosities."



The Bernal area is filled with stories of Xolotlan, Quetzalcoatl, and other figures that are venerated by the Chichimeca people. Their stories speak to the beginnings of history, the connections to the Toltecs, and even the independence of Mexican nation. The hill

of El Fronton and the pine forests of El Zamorano constitute, in the villagers' myths, the places of origin of the San Pablo and San Miguel communities.

Two mountains, El Fronton and El Zamorano, are revered by those that believe in the miraculous appearance of two images: The Holy Cross and El Divino Salvador. The first, The Holy Cross, appeared near the community of Maguey Manso, to the north of San Miguel. At the hill of El Zamorano, the second image, that of El Divino Salvador appeared,

according to the legends, exactly in the hill of the Fronton. Both images have similar characteristics, because they are constituted by a wooden cross in whose center Jesus' face is inserted. Together, these two serve as the objects of the most important pilgrimages in the region.



Finally, this enormous rock symbolizes the mixing of the indigenous communities of the region and the mestizo society that



founded the village of Bernal in the valleys and more fertile plains toward the south. With a height of 288 meters from its base to the peak, it is not difficult to understand its place as a significant landmark in the regional landscape. The physical and aesthetic characteristics of this rock, unique in the country, bring an ever-growing number of visitors to the Bernal area.

Bernal Area in Google Maps

<http://tinyurl.com/26mjjuu>

UNESCO video on the places and traditions of the Otomí-Chichimecas

<http://tinyurl.com/2fv4v3a>