



News  
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## Tepehuans dance all night

**LAJAS, Mexico (May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2004):** An eerie feeling overcame missionaries Andrew Ferguson and Barry Wingo as they approached the site of the *mitote*, a sacred Tepehuan dance. Secundino had invited them and they followed him to the small clearing, a 30-minute walk from the village.

A large group of Tepehuans was already gathered among the rocks and trees, huddled in blankets, seemingly mesmerized by the large fire that unveiled the darkness before them. Older men and some young boys sat around the fire smoking homegrown tobacco.

Secundino offered blankets to Andrew and Barry. They took them and sat down out of the way to watch.

A Tepehuan man, with his back to the fire, began a rhythmic thrumming by using a stick to hit a string held taut on a bow. It signaled the older men to action.

They walked over and stood in front of the shelter and then began to circle the fire. The older women followed, and then the younger people joined them.

After circling the fire a few times, the people began a dance, a combination of a skip and a small jump. Upon landing, their feet would slap hard against the earth, developing a rhythm as they revolved around the fire.

As people became tired they would leave the circle and sit down. After an hour the few dancers left standing ceased. It seemed like those who could dance the longest were esteemed in the minds of the others.

The men once again gathered around the fire and returned to their smoking. Other dancers found a place to rest in the nearby woods. In an hour and a half the dancing would resume, and the pattern of dancing and resting would continue until the rising of the sun.

Andrew and Barry would last until just past midnight, returning to their homes having learned some significant aspects of Tepehuan culture.

Why do the Tepehuans dance?

The people believe if the *mitote* is done right God will send rain and their crops will prosper.

They prepare themselves for this occasion by going for days without food. Men do not sleep with their wives. They abstain from anger, and they practice ritualistic bathing.

The dance is at the heart of Tepehuan culture and they take it very seriously. The people believe that the dance cleanses them from pain, sickness and sin.

Andrew and Barry are looking to the day when they can share God's Word with the Tepehuans, and show them the true way of cleansing.