

the motorcycle diaries

NOTES ON A LATIN AMERICAN JOURNEY

preface to the first edition

Ernesto Guevara's travel diaries, transcribed by Che's Personal Archive in Havana,* recount the trials, vicissitudes and tremendous adventure of a young man's journey of discovery through Latin America. Ernesto began writing these diaries when, in December 1951, he set off with his friend Alberto Granado on their long-awaited trip from Buenos Aires, down the Atlantic coast of Argentina, across the *pampas*, through the Andes and into Chile, and from Chile northward to Peru and Colombia and finally to Caracas.

These experiences were later rewritten by Ernesto himself in narrative form, offering the reader a deeper insight into Che's life, especially at a little known stage, and revealing details of his personality, his cultural background and his narrative skill — the genesis of a style which develops in his later works. The reader can also witness the extraordinary change which takes place in him as he discovers Latin America, gets right to its very heart and develops a growing sense of a Latin American identity, ultimately making him a precursor of the new history of America.

Aleida March
Che's Personal Archive
Havana, Cuba, 1993

*Now the Che Guevara Studies Center of Havana, Cuba.

ALEIDA GUEVARA p r e f a c e

When I read these notes for the first time, they were not yet in book form and I did not know the person who had written them. I was much younger then and I identified immediately with this man who had narrated his adventures in such a spontaneous way. Of course, as I continued reading, I began to see more clearly who this person was and I was very glad to be his daughter.

It is not my aim to tell you anything of what you will discover as you read, but I do not doubt that when you have finished the book you will want to go back to enjoy some passages again, either for the beauty they describe or the intensity of the feelings they convey.

There were moments when I literally took over Granado's place on the motorbike and clung to my dad's back, journeying with him over the mountains and around the lakes. I admit there were some occasions when I left him to himself, especially at those times when he writes so graphically things I would never talk about myself. When he does, however, he reveals yet again just how honest and unconventional he could be.

To tell you the truth, I should say that the more I read, the more in love I was with the boy my father had been. I do not know if you will share these sentiments with me, but while I was reading, I got

brief chronology of ernesto che guevara

1928

Ernesto Guevara is born on June 14 in Rosario, Argentina. He is the first child of middle-class parents Ernesto Guevara Lynch and Celia de la Serna.

1932

The Guevara family moves from Buenos Aires to Alta Gracia, a spa town near Córdoba, on account of Ernesto's chronic asthma. His asthma also prevents him from regular attendance at school until he is nine years old.

1948

Altering his initial plan to study engineering, Ernesto enrolls in medical school at the University of Buenos Aires, while holding a series of part-time jobs, including in an allergy treatment clinic.

1950

Ernesto sets out on a 4,500 kilometer trip around the north of Argentina on a motorized bicycle.

1951-52

In October 1951, Ernesto and his friend Alberto Granado decide on a plan to ride Alberto's motorbike (La Poderosa II — The Mighty One) to North America. Granado is a biochemist who had specialized in leprology and whose younger brothers had been Ernesto's school friends. They leave Córdoba in December, heading first to farewell Ernesto's family in Buenos Aires. The adventures experienced on this trip, written up by Ernesto during and after the journey, comprise this book, published first as *Notas de Viaje (Travel Notes or The Motorcycle Diaries)*.

1953

Ernesto graduates as a doctor and almost immediately embarks on another journey around Latin America which takes in Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Panama, Costa Rica and Guatemala, where he meets Antonio (Ñico) López, a young Cuban revolutionary. In Bolivia, he is witness to the Bolivian Revolution. The account of these travels was first published as *Otra Vez* (in English, *Latin America Diaries*).

1954

Ernesto's political views are profoundly radicalized when in Guatemala he sees the overthrow of the democratically elected government of Jacobo Árbenz by U.S.-backed forces. He escapes to Mexico where he contacts the group of Cuban revolutionary exiles. In Mexico, he marries Peruvian Hilda Gadea, with whom he has a daughter, Hildita.

1955

After meeting Fidel Castro, he agrees to join the group being organized to wage guerrilla war against the Batista dictatorship. Now called "Che" by the Cubans — a common nickname for Argentines — in November 1956 he sails as the troop's doctor on the yacht *Granma*.

1956-58

Che soon demonstrates outstanding military ability and is promoted to the rank of commander in July 1957. In December 1958, he leads the Rebel Army to a decisive victory over Batista's forces at Santa Clara in central Cuba.

1959

In February, Che is declared a Cuban citizen in recognition of his contribution to the island's liberation. He marries Aleida March, with whom he has four children. In October, he is appointed head of the Industrial Department of the Institute of Agrarian Reform and in November becomes President of the National Bank of Cuba. With a gesture of disdain for money, he signs the new banknotes simply as "Che."

1960

Representing the revolutionary government, Che undertakes an extensive trip to the Soviet Union, the German Democratic Republic, Czechoslovakia, China and North Korea, signing several key trade agreements.

1961

Che is appointed head of the newly established Ministry of Industry. In August, he heads Cuba's delegation to the Organization of American States (OAS) at Punta del Este, Uruguay, where he denounces U.S. President Kennedy's Alliance for Progress.

1962

A fusion of Cuban revolutionary organizations takes place and Che is elected to the National Directorate. Che visits the Soviet Union for the second time.

1963

Che travels to Algeria, which has just won independence from France under the government of Ahmed Ben Bella.

1964

Before heading off for an extensive trip around Africa, Che addresses the UN General Assembly in December.

1965

Che leads an international mission to the Congo to support the liberation movement founded by Patrice Lumumba. Responding to mounting speculation about Che's whereabouts, Fidel Castro reads Che's farewell letter to the Central Committee of the newly founded Cuban Communist Party. In December, Che returns to Cuba to prepare in secret for a new mission to Bolivia.

1966

In November, Che arrives in Bolivia in disguise.

1967

In April, Che's "Message to the Tricontinental" is published, calling for the creation of "two, three, many Vietnams." The same month, part of his guerrilla group becomes separated from the main detachment. On October 8, the remaining 17 guerrillas are ambushed and Che is wounded and captured. The following day he is murdered by Bolivian forces acting under instructions from Washington. His remains are buried in an unmarked grave along with the bodies of several other guerrilla fighters. October 8 is designated the Day of the Heroic Guerrilla in Cuba.

1997

Che's remains are finally located in Bolivia and returned to Cuba, where they are placed in a memorial at Santa Clara.

map of the motorcycle diaries

