Spanish instructor to visit South America

Photo by Tom Gessner

Suzy Prenger

By Alice Hrnicek

A new year.

Suzy Prenger, coordinator of the UNL Overseas Opportunity Center and Spanish instructor, is both excited and apprehensive.

Prenger is spending 1980 in South America, traversing its climates which fluctuate from the cold of the snow-capped Andes Mountains to the heat of the Amazon River and surrounding jungle. She must fit all the clothes she needs into one backpack.

She will climb mountains, run river barges, interpret Spanish, write travel journals and chat with the natives—all of which she has never done before.

But Prenger is not alone. Accompanying her will be nine people, all professionals in one or more areas of traveling.

People on the trip consist of the trip director, from Australia, two Swiss, three British, two Canadians, another Australian and herself.

Prenger has met only one of them, director Al Townsing.

In 10 months to a year, the group hopes to put together a photographic essay and a documentary film on overland traveling, she said. The project will not concentrate on the Latin American culture, but rather on logistical problems of traveling with private transportation across the continent, she said.

TOWNSING ORIGINALLY came up with the idea when he was guiding two-to-three month tours in South America for an Australian touring agency called Encounter Overland.

A friend of Prenger's went on one of his tours and heard him talk about the idea. The friend told him Prenger was interested in going, she said.

Prenger wrote Townsing and after she persisted, he came to visit her and decided she would be an asset with her Spanish-speaking ability and knowledge of foreign travel.

Each of the people on the tour has been researching a specific area of the continent in preparation. Prenger is in charge of learning about Peru.

"It will be a group teaching project, but not an academic trip," she said.

The group will meet New Year's Eve in Cartugena, Columbia, and start the next day in a truck on a circular route around the continent.

They will pass through the Angel Falls area of Venezuela onto the Transamazonian Highway into Brazil where they will see the Yanamamo Indians in the jungle.

IN MATO GROSSO they will be side by side with Pantanaal wildlife, which the Canadians wish to photograph extensively, Prenger said.

In the Paraguayan Chaco region, they will visit a Mennonite settlement and speak with an expert in Guacho folklore.

"This area relates so much to Nebraska, with its cowboys and the plains experience."

After winding around the southern tip of South America into the Andean Mountains and Atacama Desert, the group will climb Mt. Aconcagua, the highest mountain on the continent.

Prenger said she is looking forward most to visiting Macchupicchu, an old Inca settlement.

The troupe will climb several volcanoes in Ecuador and go to the Galapagos Islands, after which they will return to Cartugena.

Preparations for the trip have been extensive, Prenger said.

"The shots and immunizations and equipment we need are just incredible," she added. Estimated cost for the year's traveling is $4,500 a person, she said.

She will be keeping a journal and plans to send articles back to American newspapers, she said. She also will help write the script for the film.

"I've been concentrating on the experiences of women traveling alone (after she traveled by herself in Europe for five months) and on students' traveling. Traveling is one of the best ways of learning."

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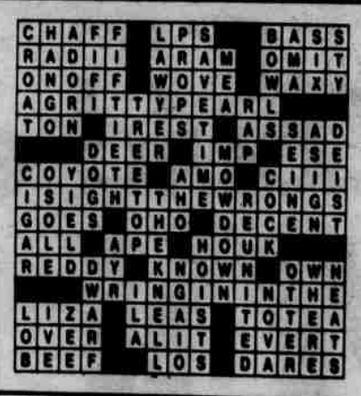

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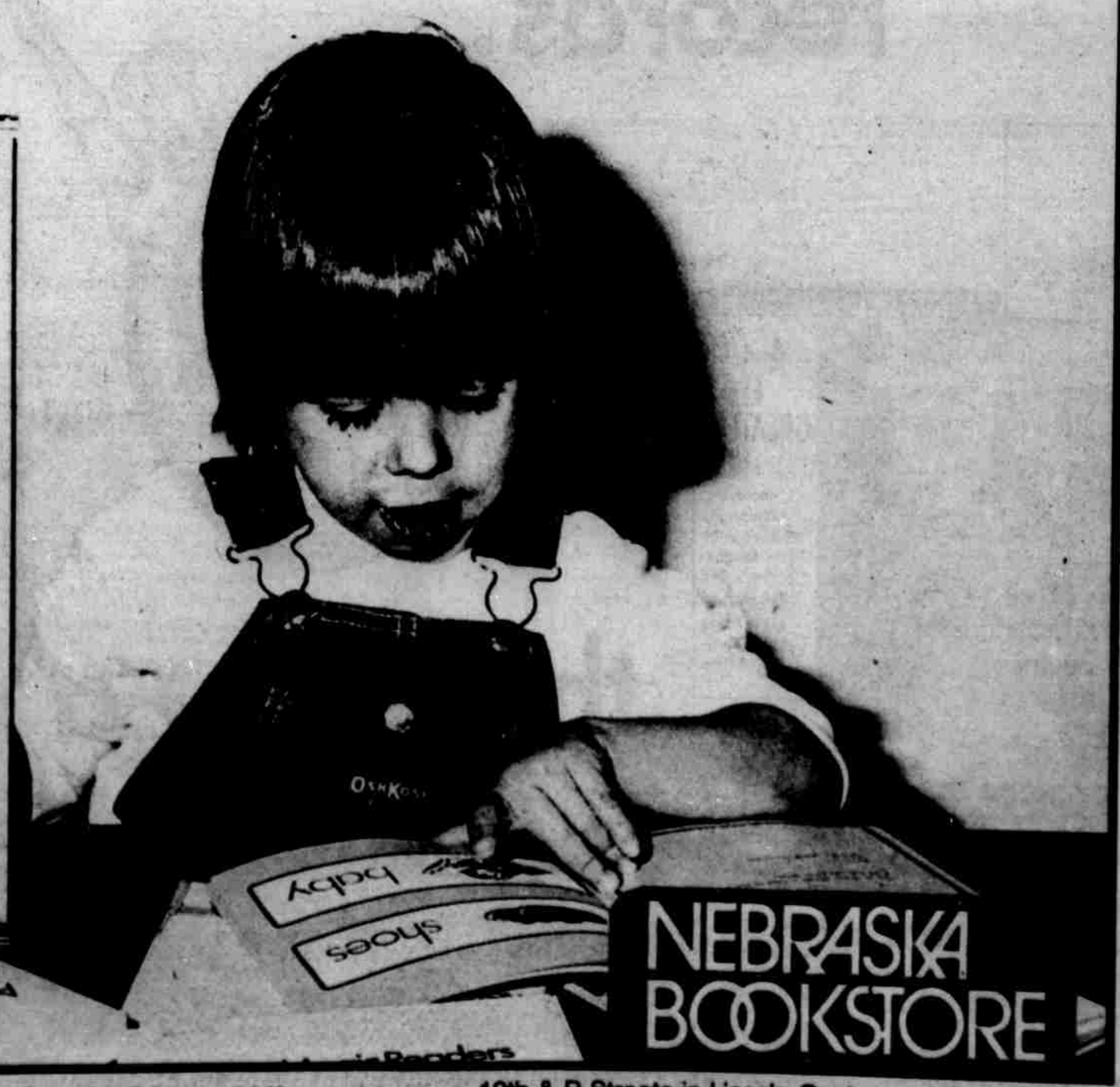

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