Perspective

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

Ruts

(Editor's Note: Readers of last week's Perspective know that Columnist Buckingham again cruelly villified the editor. If this continues it may become necessary to reveal the identity of the person whose brilliant plumbing manipulations caused the flooding of a men's dormitory at Mercer University, and whose tampering with wording on the ATO fraternity float shocked the multitudes as it wound with the parade through Macon, Ga. For the present, however, the exercise of restraint results in no written response to last week's unwarranted abuse of the editor).

Several months ago I led a small group of men on a two-week camping journey through the Sinai desert. We were following the footsteps of Moses from the Gulf of Suez where the legendary "Red Sea" crossing took place to Mt. Nebo in Jordan where the great leader remained as the Israelites crossed the Jordan River into Canaan.

The trip was made in an open, four-wheel-drive desert truck from which we often dismounted to climb mountains or trek through the deep wadis (dried river beds) of the Sinai. At one juncture the men spotted some abandoned turquois mines high on the side of a nearby mountain. I asked our Israeli driver if he would pull the truck out of the ruts used by the vehicles which had gone before and drive across the open sand to the side of the mountain.

He refused, saying it was too dangerous.

During the earlier Sinai Campaign the Israelis had mined that particular wadi, knowing it was the only way the Egyptians could travel through the rugged territory. However, at the height of the campaign a rare and unexpected rain fell on the Sinai. Torrents of water fell on the desert mountains, pouring off the sides of the steep and treeless mountains and roaring through the ancient riverbed in destructive mayhem on its way to the Red Sea. The land mines had been swept out of the ground and scattered all over the plains. Some had exploded, but others were buried beneath the trackless sand. Experienced guides knew the only safe place to drive was in the ruts made by a previous vehicle. In fact, just a few months before an Israeli colonel had been killed when his jeep ran over one of those old land mines and it exploded.

The driver of our truck said the only way we could explore the turquois mines would be to dismount and walk across the sand. We did. But most pilgrims, I understand, having been told of the situation, choose to stay in the safety of the ruts — and therefore miss the excitement of discovery.

Most of us, whether it comes to progress in the community or venturing out in spiritual explorations, opt for ruts. Sure, it's dangerous to leave the beaten track. The ruts of tradition are safe and comfortable. But communities, like people, need to grow. Or they die. Sometimes from boredom and sameness. Growth demands change. Change demands movement — sometimes across the trackless sands of the untried.

So much of that which holds us in bondage is traditional. Cultural. In our effort to protect the weak we hamstring the strong. Afraid of discovery, which may demand change, we pass laws — country laws, church laws — designed to limit those who might venture into the deeper areas of spiritual discovery or community progress. For ruts are safe, and for the most part we are people of limited vision and little courage.

Let us hope the institutions around us — both those dealing in political and spiritual matters — will soon thrust into leadership men unafraid to venture out. Otherwise we are doomed to spend another season in the safety — and the drudgery — of ruts.