



# BAJA NEWS



**San Ysidro Border Construction:** Work continues on the San Ysidro border booths for the northbound lanes. All booths are expected to be open and operating by October 2014. The final funding for the completion of the San Ysidro project was passed by the House in July and now awaits approval by the Senate.



**“Cross Border Xpress” to Open Summer 2015:** The pedestrian bridge that will connect San Diego to the Tijuana airport is due to open next summer. Ticketed passengers will be able to cross directly from San Diego to the TJ airport with expedited service.



**Repairs on Toll Road to Ensenada:** Work on repairing the collapsed toll road to Ensenada continues. Traffic is still being rerouted inland along the free road. The toll road is still expected to reopen in the fall.



Tired of battling the crowds at the San Ysidro border? We’ve put together step-by-step photo directions to arrive at the SENTRI lanes at the Otay Mesa border crossing from the Boulevard 2000. We highly recommend using the Boulevard 2000 if you’re coming up Mex 1 south of Rosarito. It’s a beautifully paved highway that cuts around Tijuana traffic making your trip back to the U.S. faster and easier! For step-by-step directions: [www.discoverbaja.com/wp-content/uploads/Otay-SENTRI-Directions.pdf](http://www.discoverbaja.com/wp-content/uploads/Otay-SENTRI-Directions.pdf)

## From the DBTC Office

*We hope you’re enjoying the dog days of summer by taking advantage of the Pacific breezes, ocean waters and frozen margaritas.*

*The office will be closed on Saturday, August 16<sup>th</sup> for staff enhancement. As always, you can still process insurance and DBTC membership online 24/7 at [www.discoverbaja.com](http://www.discoverbaja.com)*

*DBTC will also be closed Aug. 30, 31 and Sept. 1 for Labor Day.*

*See you in Baja!  
Hugh, Carol, Jen, Maythé & Monica*



**PESO EXCHANGE RATE:**  
\$13.19 to \$1 U.S. dollar

### PEMEX PRICES

**Northern Baja:**  
Magna: \$3.83/gal  
Premium: \$4.04/gal  
Diesel: \$3.93/gal  
**Southern Baja:**  
Magna: \$3.90/gal  
Premium: \$3.98/gal  
Diesel: \$3.93/gal

# ON OUR RADAR FOR AUGUST

To keep up on the latest Baja events, check out [www.discoverbaja.com/events](http://www.discoverbaja.com/events)



## AUG 1-17 Valle de Guadalupe Vendimia Wine Harvest Festival

- Individual parties with food, music and wine at restaurants and wineries throughout the Guadalupe Valley
- [bit.ly/1iVypMQ](http://bit.ly/1iVypMQ)

## AUG 15-16 TJ Beer Fest

- CECUT in Tijuana
- Come try some of the great Baja craft beers!
- An evening of beer, food and live entertainment
- [www.facebook.com/tjbeerfest](https://www.facebook.com/tjbeerfest)



## AUG 22-24 Baja Blues Fest

- This three day festival features blues music, food, arts and raffle prizes, all to benefit local children's charities
- [www.bajabluesfest.org](http://www.bajabluesfest.org)



## AUG 23-24 Arte en el Valle

- Museo de la Vid y el Vino, Valle de Guadalupe
- 40 local artist will have their art available for exhibit and sale
- [bit.ly/XzkEKy](http://bit.ly/XzkEKy)



## Baja Blues Fest

The 3<sup>rd</sup> annual Baja Blues Fest will take place August 22-24, 2014 at the Rosarito Beach Hotel.

The festival starts with a meet & greet party on Friday night and goes through a jam session on Sunday afternoon. The main event is all day Saturday with live music, local artists, food vendors and a raffle. Raffle prizes include an overnight stay in the Valle de Guadalupe, a mini vacation near La Bufadora and Carnival Line 3-day Blues Cruise trip.

The Backwater Blues Band, and The Mannish Boys featuring Sugaray Rayford and Kid Ramos are headlining among other blues acts. It's a fun and lively festival that also supports the local community. Proceeds from the festival benefit Baja children's charities such as Baja Scholarship Foundation, BECA, Friends of the Library, La Misión Children's Fund and Los Angelitos Orphanage.

For ticket prices and more information: [www.bajabluesfest.org](http://www.bajabluesfest.org)

# Join Discover Baja and Baja Custom Tours for a *Journey to Mata Ortiz, Mexico!*

Sept. 24-29, 2014



Join Discover Baja and Baja Custom Tours on a wonderful adventure to Mata Ortiz, Mexico! This six-day trip will take place from September 24-19, 2014. Trip will start and end in San Diego.

This trip is full of treasures—ancient ruins, newly discovered caverns, unique handcrafted pottery, and always, the wonderful Mexican people. It is hard not to become enchanted with the village of Mata Ortiz and its warm, compassionate, talented people. It is home to the legendary Juan Quezada – the magnificent artist and humble teacher who has discovered the lost secrets of this special type of pottery making and has taught them to the people in his village. You'll meet local pottery artists, learn about the pottery process, watch the artists making their pottery, and, of course, get the opportunity to purchase some of the pots to take home with you. In addition to experiencing the pottery scene in Mata Ortiz, you'll have the opportunity to visit ancient petroglyphs and cave dwellings at Cueva de la Jolla, and see the Paquime Archeological Zone, ruins of a civilization from the 1200s. On the way back from Mexico, a stop at the Kartchner Caverns State Park in Arizona will be sure to amaze!

This will be a perfect opportunity to buy gifts and either start, or add to, your own collection of Mata Ortiz pottery. These works of art will only increase in value as Mata Ortiz becomes better known throughout the world. Visit the village now while it is still relatively untouched!

*The all-inclusive price of \$1,295 is based on double occupancy.*

**To reserve your space, please call Discover Baja at 800-727-2252 or email [ask@discoverbaja.com](mailto:ask@discoverbaja.com)**

**For more information and a full itinerary of the trip: [www.discoverbaja.com/2014/08/06/mata-ortiz/](http://www.discoverbaja.com/2014/08/06/mata-ortiz/)**





# RETURN TO MALARRIMO BEACH

By GRAHAM MACKINTOSH

Thirty years ago I was in the middle of a two-year quest to walk around the coast of Baja California. Pacific lagoons such as Ojo de Liebre (Scammon's Lagoon) and Laguna San Ignacio presented special challenges.

Heading north to south and unable to find any fishcamps on the northern shore, I had no option but to walk all the way around Laguna San Ignacio, but I wasn't inclined to do that with Scammon's Lagoon.

I didn't want to miss an inch of Malarrimo beach, the famed beachcombing paradise that comprises much of Bahía Vizcaíno, and perhaps most famously stretches from the lagoon mouth 15-20 miles west towards Punta Eugenia. Unfortunately, five miles southwest of Scammon's, a new lagoon had broken through into the desert creating a miles-deep barrier called Estero Ojo de Liebre on some maps and Laguna Mike McMahan in the Baja Almanac.

Even though I was not sure I could get around that new lagoon, the siren call of Malarrimo couldn't be resisted. Wearing the boots of a man killed in Scammon's Lagoon when his boat collided with a gray whale, I hitched a ride in a panga and was dropped just inside the western entrance to

Scammon's. It was high tide. Blinding white dunes lined the shore. I struggled alone, sometimes calf-deep in the alarmingly soft sand, to make my way around to the firmer beaches and rolling thunderous waves of the open ocean.

Malarrimo was not a disappointment; the beachcombing was indeed fantastic. The story was told in my book, *Into a Desert Place*:

"It was as if some terrible and destructive battle had taken place off the coast. The shore was littered with planks, buckets, tree trunks, helmets, hatch covers, bits and pieces of boats and planes, and all kinds of military and medical equipment." *Into a Desert Place*

But with just three gallons of water I hardly had time to take in a fraction of what was around me. I was driven by the thought that unless I was prepared to risk a 10-mile detour through swamp and mangroves and more strength-sapping soft dunes, or build a raft from all the driftwood, I had no idea how I was going to cross the wide mouth of that new lagoon. In the end, I was able to get over using an old aluminum boat that I found just inside the lagoon's entrance. It was upside down, under water and full of holes.

As part of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my walk, with a new book in mind, I've been returning to some of the special, mostly remote, places in Baja to see how they have changed. And above all, I have always wanted to get back to that remote section of coast between the lagoons and walk it again with more time to beachcomb and ponder the natural and historical wonders beneath my boots.

Today that area is just a tiny part of the largest protected zone in Mexico, indeed in all of Latin America - the *El Vizcaíno Biosphere Reserve*. Established in 1988, the reserve includes hundreds of kilometers of the Pacific coast and the Sea of Cortez, and much of the desert between. It includes the habitat of the endangered pronghorn antelope, as well as the world renowned sites of Laguna Ojo de Liebre and Laguna San Ignacio, and the cave painting treasures of the Sierra de San Francisco.

The Vizcaíno Biosphere Reserve is administered and managed by CONANP, the National Commission of Natural Protected Areas. Their headquarters is in Guerrero Negro. So thirty years on, in July 2014, after explaining my intentions to the officials at CONANP and reassuring them that I had no intention of using

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any motorized transport on the beach, I secured permission to return again to Malarrimo. They not only graciously granted it, but arranged a panga ride across the wide mouth of Laguna Ojo de Liebre and kindly offered every assistance to get there and return safely to town.

I went in the company of longtime friend and Discover Baja member Peter Jensen. And I couldn't have wished for a more knowledgeable companion. He is a Baja shipwreck historian who for over 30 years has discovered, researched, and collated extensive files on over 1000 shipwrecks along the Baja California coast.

We both bought Annual passes, "pasaportes," there at the CONANP office, which not only granted us a full year's access to the Vizcaíno Biosphere Reserve but also to visit all the parks and protected areas of Mexico – for a very reasonable cost of about \$29 US.

I was nursing a strong sense of *déjà vu* when we landed at about the same spot that I did all those years ago, just inside the lagoon, this time at low tide. Peter and I arranged to be picked up in a week and quickly moved our gear

off the beach and made camp among the dunes. I had a SPOT GPS messaging device to assure our families and the folks at the CONANP office that all was well.

The snow-white, talcum-powdery-soft dunes were still there, making for tiring walking. The wind was still relentless. Camping in the protection of the dunes might seem like a good idea... till sheets of fine sand begin covering tent floors, sleeping bags, pots and plates and anything else left exposed. I took three Canon point-and-shoot cameras out with me. Only one survived the insidious assault of the blowing sand.

Camping anywhere around the entrance to Scammon's Lagoon presents some of the most challenging camping anywhere in Baja. With no vegetation more than a couple of inches tall there is absolutely no shade. Coyotes visit every night and are happy to relieve you of anything left out, especially water. And when the wind relents, biting horseflies seize the chance to munch on your legs.

To compensate – the Pacific beaches are wide (at least at low tide) and strikingly beautiful, summer temperatures are

generally tolerable, and can seem downright cool when the prevailing 15-20 mph NW winds are still gusting after sundown. The bird life was abundant and pods of dolphins patrolled offshore, sometimes bursting into the shallows and chasing fish right on to the beach.

Maybe beachcombing was not as dramatic as in the glory days when Malarrimo was regarded as the inevitable final destination for just about anything that would float that had been cast into the Northern Pacific.

Today, Malarrimo makes you work hard for every discovery. One needs to sift through a prodigious amount of modern trash, especially plastic containers, glass bottles and jars, light bulbs, deflated party balloons, and even rusting fridges!

And sadly, there were a number of empty blue plastic gasoline barrels, in otherwise new condition that had been deliberately slashed. No doubt these had been thrown overboard by drug runners not wishing to leave a too obvious trail of tossed containers marking their route north.

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**Left: Graham covers up from the midday sun. Above: Some of the trash scattered along Malarrimo Beach. 5**

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Even so, it remains endlessly fascinating. Dead whales and dolphins and huge tree trunks abound. And the ever shifting dunes – we measured the one next to our campsite moving an inch a day towards us – guarantee there is always something “old” for the discerning eye to see.

Back in 1983 I had spotted a piece of wreckage, the wooden hull of a sailing ship covered with copper sheathing stamped, “Shears of London.” We looked for more of the wreckage to confirm if this ship might have been the *Toward Castle*, a British whaling vessel that went aground on that section of beach in 1838.

The Master, Chief Mate, and five of the crew were saved. They had taken to the ship’s lifeboat to find help. Those that stayed behind on the remote beach died of thirst and exposure before their crewmates returned. In his writings, Captain Scammon mentioned the wreck and finding the log book, and using some of its timber to fuel fires for rendering his take of whale blubber into oil.

We found plenty of evidence of nineteenth-century vessels, including sections of deck and sturdy “knees” (massive L-shaped brackets cut out of tree stumps that once held up the deck), and an assortment of masts, booms and spars.

Thanks to Peter’s expertise, especially his discovery from delving into the Lloyd’s archives that the *Toward Castle* had indeed been refitted and re-sheathed with copper in London in 1835, and Scammon’s account of the location of the wreck, we were very confident that some of the remains did come from the *Toward Castle*, which was named after a castle in Scotland.

On July 4, we walked to the mouth of the new lagoon that had caused me so much concern thirty years earlier. The passage was several hundred yards wide. I marveled that I had been bold enough to row across in a sinking boat using a piece of driftwood as a paddle! It was partly desperation – I didn’t want to share the fate of the unfortunate crew of the *Toward Castle* – and partly being encouraged by finding a message in a bottle... a religious tract entitled *Help from Above!*

And reward for my faith, I recalled that within minutes of reaching the far side I stubbed my toe against a full bottle of Japanese whisky.

On this trip Peter and I did spot bottles of Japanese whisky and sake (unfortunately empty) and crates from Tokyo and Osaka, but perhaps nothing indicative of the vast amount of material from the recent tragic tsunami in Japan. That has clearly yet to arrive.

And it was fitting that as we stood ankle-deep in the soft sand at the mouth of the lagoon, as I gave thanks for the good fortune I’d experienced there all those years before, lightning flashed and thunder boomed from a summer storm billowing on the other side.

It was yet more of the magic of Baja... we were being treated to our own special Independence Day fireworks show.

Graham Mackintosh is the author of *Into a Desert Place: a 3000 mile walk around the coast of Baja California* and three other adventure travel books on Baja California. For more information: [www.grahammackintosh.com](http://www.grahammackintosh.com)



**Peter examining pieces of old ship wrecks found along Malarrimo**

# What to Do if You Have a Car Accident in Mexico

*With your Mexican auto insurance, it is extremely important that you report any accident WHILE YOU ARE IN MEXICO. Waiting until you return to the United States or Canada could result in claim denial or a reduced payment.*

-If you are involved in an accident in Mexico, tend to any personal injuries first, and remain as calm as possible.

-Dial the emergency hotline 066 (this is the equivalent of 911 in the U.S.). Make sure they send out someone to make a report. The accident report is very important to have in order to file a claim.

-Have your FMM, passport and insurance policy ready to show the authorities when they arrive at the scene.

-Get the contact and insurance information from the other drivers involved in the accident.

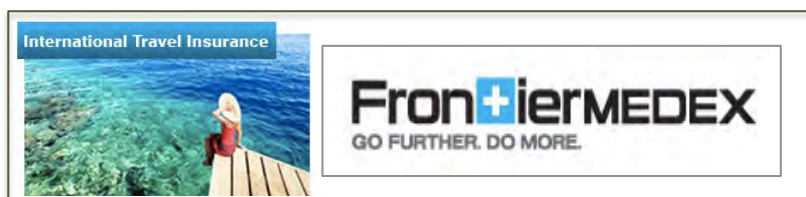
-Get in contact with the insurance company as soon as possible. Call the toll free number listed on your policy (HDI Seguros toll free within Mexico 01-800-019-6000 or direct 01-477-710-4781, ACE Seguros toll free within Mexico 01-800-362-7288 or direct 01-818-374-8053). The insurance representatives in the claims offices are bilingual, so you will be able to handle matters in English.

-When you call the insurance company to report the accident, also speak to the Legal Aid department for advice and assistance in dealing with authorities. You have the right to ask for an attorney if taken to the police station.

-Do not sign anything (especially settlement agreements) or take any payment from others involved in the accident without consulting with the insurance company. Doing so could void your insurance coverage.

-If the accident is minor, you should not experience any lengthy delay in your trip. If the accident is serious, both vehicles will likely be impounded until the police determine fault. Be sure to obtain and save a copy of the police report for insurance purposes. Once back from Mexico, you can follow up on a claim by calling 1-800-284-9783 for HDI and 1-866-223-8023 for ACE.

-If the car can be driven safely, you may bring it back to the U.S. for repairs. All Discover Baja insurance policies (through ACE and HDI) will pay for repairs to be made in the U.S. or Canada.



## INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL INSURANCE

We're often asked for referrals on travel insurance and we're pleased to announce that we've partnered with Frontier Medex to bring you additional travelers insurance while you're traveling in Baja. Benefits include:

- International medical insurance,
- Emergency evacuation, repatriation and worldwide travel assistance
- 24/7 emergency response center
- Up to \$100,000 in benefits with deductibles as low as \$100

See [www.discoverbaja.com/mexican-auto-insurance/travel-insurance](http://www.discoverbaja.com/mexican-auto-insurance/travel-insurance) for more information.

## EMERGENCY BAJA PHONE NUMBERS

Emergency Assistance: **066**

Tourist Assistance Hotline  
with 24/7 Bilingual Aid: **078**

Green Angels Roadside  
Assistance:  
**1-800-990-3900** (Tijuana,  
Ensenada, & El Hongo roads)  
**1-800-888-0911** (Tijuana,  
Tecate toll roads)

U.S. Consulate in Tijuana  
**664-977-2000** (7:30am-4pm)  
**001-619-692-2154** (after-  
hours emergency)

# THE SPANISH MISSIONS ON THE CALIFORNIA PENINSULA: #26, El Descanso (1810-1834)

By David Kier

The history of El Descanso is told without the usual documentation available for most missions. From the few notes and letters that have survived, we know that Padre Tomás de Ahumada arrived to his new post at Mission San Miguel in mid 1809. Not long after his arrival, a flood devastated the mission's fields. By 1810, Ahumada had relocated the mission to El Descanso, eight miles north.

Perhaps the biggest question is if El Descanso is truly a separate mission at all, or just an alternate location for San Miguel. The mission was often called 'San Miguel la Nueva' (New San Miguel) by the Dominicans. San Miguel was always after called 'Misión Vieja' (Old Mission). Both locations were served by only one priest, and Spanish government officials had no input on this action by Ahumada. Mexico's war of independence began in 1810, and the two Californias were without the typical support from Spain. While El Descanso is perhaps not technically a separate mission from San Miguel, it is considered such by Mexico's INAH (National Institute of Anthropology and History) and many history writers. The following letter by Padre Ahumada (resident missionary of San Miguel between June, 1809 and February, 1815) provides the evidence for when mission activities were moved to El Descanso. The letter was written from San Miguel, indicating Ahumada returned to there. Perhaps he operated both locations simultaneously?

*"This mission (San Miguel) lost its irrigable lands in some floods, when I had just recently come to it, and I moved the mission to*



2002 photo by Jack Swords at the 1830 mission site.

*Descanso, which is eight leagues to the north where there are some moist lands. This ground was located beside the Arroyo del Mogano, where wheat and barley are grown by dry farming with some abundance. I discovered a valley which I named Santo Domingo, where there is more than sufficient land for any kind of cultivation at any time of the year. A beautiful lagoon provides the moisture throughout the whole year, offering abundant soil suitable for growing corn and frijoles. There are a church and living quarters for all seasons of the year.*

*In San Marcos (to the east of San Miguel) one can direct at small cost a river of water which descends a nearby sierra and is lost in a sandy arroyo. It is the one that brought the above-mentioned flood to the ruined mission.*

*Fr. Ahumada."*

Ruins of Ahumada's Descanso mission may be those now at a cemetery, overlooking the Descanso valley, from the south rim. Meigs identifies the location as a 'fort' since it commands a

strategic location. It somewhat mirrors the placement of the San Miguel mission, which also is above and overlooking a valley, on its south side.

Padre Felix Caballero was the next Dominican assigned to San Miguel, starting in May, 1815. Caballero would remain in charge in northern Baja California for the next 24 years. By 1819, Caballero was also serving the needs of Mission Santa Catalina. Padre José Martínez was also at San Miguel from 1819 to 1822, and it is unknown how much time (if any) was spent at El Descanso. Unknown is the year Padre Caballero moved primary mission operations from Descanso (San Miguel la Nueva) back to San Miguel (Misión Vieja) or if both locations had equal status as one mission at two sites?

What is clear is that Padre Caballero reestablished El Descanso in 1830 with construction of new buildings. Caballero employed the *gentile Indians* of the tribe of Chief Jatiñil for the new construction. Caballero's mission is in the





A 1927 photo by Peveril Megis, looking south at the 1830 mission site showing the possible 1810 site identified as “Fort,” in the distance

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valley on the north side of the arroyo. Three and a half miles up the valley from El Descanso was a mission orchard of some 20 acres. A 25 foot square reservoir next to a spring and a 500 yard long irrigation ditch was documented in 1927 by Peveril Meigs at this site. It is named La Viña after a huge grapevine there. In June of 1834, Caballero moved mission functions from both El Descanso and San Miguel some 15 miles east, to his new church of Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe.

In 1879, Manuel Clemente Rojo produced historical notes on activities in Baja California to replace documents destroyed during an 1843 rebellion in La Paz. One of these notes contains an interview with Chief Jatiñil in which he states he has been the chief since 1822. His father and grandfather were chiefs before him because command of the

tribe has always been in the hands of his family, and that is why the tribe bears his name. He continues with, “I helped Father Caballero build Mission El Descanso from its foundation to the end”. Jatiñil also helped Caballero build Mission Guadalupe in 1834, but would later turn against the Dominican padre because the Jatiñil people were being forcibly baptized.

The boundary between the Dominican administration and Franciscan administration of California was first marked by Franciscan Padre Palóu in 1773 at the next valley just north of El Descanso, Arroyo el Médano. This was the first separation line of New and Old California (later called Upper and Lower California). However, California remained as one political unit until 1804. In 1788, Padre Sales moved the boundary line north to

Arroyo Rosarito, and there it remained until the Mexican War ended in 1848 when Upper California became part of the United States and the line was moved even further north.

The mission walls had all eroded away by the 1950’s and a new church was constructed on the site. Many locals were not even aware of its existence in the 1960’s, according to history writer Choral Pepper who labeled Descanso as a ‘lost mission’. Foundation ruins were exposed in a 1997 archeological dig, and the site was partially covered by a steel awning.

The 1830 ruins are next to a church and are partially protected by an awning. Use the Free Ensenada Highway and take the road east by the lagoon and creek that goes under the toll highway, between Puerto Nuevo and Cantamar.

**David Kier is co-author of ‘The Old Missions of Baja & Alta California, 1697-1834’. The book is available for purchase at the DBTC offices (call 800-727-2252). You can follow along with the series to learn about the history of all of the Baja California missions on the DBTC blog and in future newsletters.**





*Photo by Paul J. Curtis*

## It's Whale Shark Season!

The whale shark is a slow-moving filter feeding shark, and the world's largest fish (they can get up to over 40 feet in length!). Completely harmless to humans, these gentle giants are currently roaming the waters of Bahia de Los Angeles.

Don't miss the opportunity to swim, snorkel and kayak with these rare and magnificent creatures.

### **PROPERTY FOR SALE IN SAN MIGUEL DE COMONDÚ:**

A lot with a producing avocado orchard, equipped with aseQUIAS (irrigation channels), approximately 1700 square meters in size. San Miguel de Comondú is located two hours on paved road from the port of Loreto. It is a quiet little town for vacationing and relaxing. The listing price is \$65,000 U.S., the first payment being \$30,000 U.S. and the remainder in two payments. Call or text Alberto Cota Murillo, 011-52-613-114-7751.

