



# May 2014 Newsletter

## BAJA NEWS

For full news stories, updates and reviews on Baja, be sure to check out the DBTC BLOG: [discoverbaja.wordpress.com](http://discoverbaja.wordpress.com)

### Scenic Toll Road to Ensenada is Due to Reopen in Fall

Traffic is still being rerouted inland along the free road detour in both directions from La Misión to Ensenada due to a road collapse at Salsipuedes. The toll road is currently expected to reopen in the fall. For photos and more information about the detour, see [bit.ly/1nUtgRP](http://bit.ly/1nUtgRP)

### San Diego/Tijuana Rodriguez Airport Bridge

Construction on a cross-border bridge between San Diego and Tijuana's Rodriguez airport is due to start construction in May 2014. Departing passengers will be able to park their car in San Diego and walk across the border to the airport. Arriving passengers will be able to cross directly back to the U.S., going through a U.S. customs facility and therefore avoiding lengthy waits at the San Ysidro and Otay Mesa ports of entry.

### San Ysidro Border Updates

Construction continues on the San Ysidro border. Northbound passenger lanes 11-18 will be closed until July to accommodate final canopy construction. Drivers will still be able to use available lanes. The construction and partial lane closures will continue until fall 2014. For more about the San Ysidro border project: [www.gsa.gov/sanysidro/poe](http://www.gsa.gov/sanysidro/poe)

### Drought in Ensenada

You may have heard about the drought problems that Ensenada is having. Most cities in northern Baja get their water from the Colorado river, but Ensenada relies on aquifers that have reached low levels due to lack of rainfall and high temperatures. While most neighborhoods in Ensenada are experiencing water shut offs on certain days, all large hotels have water reserves in large *pilas* (water tanks) so tourists should not expect any disruption in water service.

### Changes at La Fonda

At the end of February, there were reports of long-time legal battles coming to a head, owner disputes and seized property at the legendary La Fonda. The old, previous owner of La Fonda, Dmytri is now back and has control of the hotel and has reopened the old restaurant area. The owners that have been running La Fonda for the past few years, are still running the restaurant on the north end of the property. The good news is that there are now two legendary Sunday brunch buffets.

### Cabo Pulmo Development Threat

For the third time, a proposed mega-resort project is threatening to develop Cabo Pulmo National Park, home to one of the world's richest marine reserves and important coral reef system. The intended project, called "Cabo Dorado," has not been approved yet and is being met with much adversity from environmental groups.

## From the DBTC Office

Summer is just around the corner which means that the fish are biting, the waves are prime for surfing and it's a great time to get out and explore northern Baja where the temperatures stay cool.

Memorial Day is a busy Baja weekend so be sure to get insurance and FMMs in advance through Discover Baja. Make reservations early for hotels and campsites. The DBTC offices will be closed May 24-26 in observance of the holiday (because, hey, we like to get out and explore Baja too!).

Let's Baja!

Hugh, Carol, Jen, Maythé & Monica



### PEMEX PRICES

#### Northern Baja:

Magna: \$3.72/gal  
Premium: \$3.91/gal  
Diesel: \$3.83/gal

#### Southern Baja:

Magna: \$3.90/gal  
Premium: \$3.98/gal  
Diesel: \$3.93/gal

### PESO EXCHANGE RATE:

\$13.13 to \$1 U.S. dollar

For **ROAD CONDITIONS** see [discoverbaja.wordpress.com/road-conditions/](http://discoverbaja.wordpress.com/road-conditions/)

## From our members...

**We love to hear your feedback on things you'd like to read about, great places you've been to and comments on what we can do to better serve you. Please email us at [ask@discoverbaja.com](mailto:ask@discoverbaja.com)**

*Just want to let you know that we had a magnificent six nights in the Ensenada/ Estero Beach/Guadalupe Valley areas. You often make food recommendations in the DB newsletter. Here are some for YOU:*

- 1. Mariscos de Baja California (across from the McDonald's in Ensenada). Their deep-fried whole red snapper at \$10.00 is incredible!*
- 2. The Estero Beach Hotel Restaurant: their grilled Mako shark plate is sumptuous, and their beautifully presented and ample fish ceviche tostadas are a steal at 20 pesos. We did not try their new Sunday buffet at \$10.00 U.S., but we heard many favorable comments.*
- 3. The Jireh Restaurant in Ensenada: their very lean and 1" thick ribeye steak was a hit on two consecutive nights with our group of twelve, as well as with a couple of Mexicali dentists we invited to join us. The fish plates were also great.*
- 4. Alfredo Perez' Tapanco in south Rosarito is always good, as you well know. I believe Tapanco is #1 of 36 rated restaurants in Rosarito.*
- 5. Tacos El Gerente in Rosarito (first parallel side street east of Benito Juarez) is awesome and always consistent in quality and portions. It has replaced Tacos Yaqui as our favorite and the favorite of our kids and friends.*
- 6. Rosarito Beach Hotel Restaurant: The Eggs Benedict at \$4.50 U.S. are great, and a real bargain. Kids (and others, who enjoy a good malt or milkshake), should try the milkshakes. I especially like the strawberry/banana one at \$2.50 U.S. Their Teriyaki chicken "Getaway Entree" is a good value at \$8.50 U.S., and their large fresh fruit platter at \$4.50 U.S. (with granola and vanilla yogurt at no extra charge) is easily enough for two!!! The delicious and refreshing mango margarita is a real bargain at \$3.50 U.S., and much better than their regular margarita.*

~Ed Leon

**DBTC Note: Thanks, Ed! Carol and Hugh tried the brunch at Estero Beach Hotel in February and it was superb! For more member trip reports, visit [discoverbaja.wordpress.com/category/trip-reports/](http://discoverbaja.wordpress.com/category/trip-reports/)**

## FAMILY FUN ON A BAJA ROAD TRIP

When her daughters' spring break came around this year, DBTC staffer, Monica Garcia, took the family down to Baja for a six-day, fun-filled family trip to see the gray whales. Here are some of the highlights:

**DAY 1:** "We first stopped in El Rosario. We stayed at the Baja Cactus and ate at the famous "Mama Espinozas." The food was great!

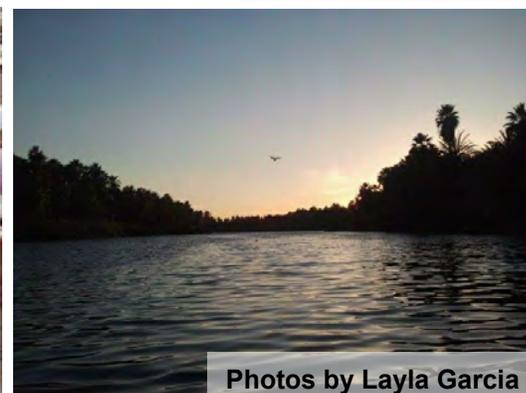
**DAY 2:** "Next stop was the San Ignacio Springs Bed & Breakfast. We did a little kayaking on the river. The sunset was gorgeous!"

**DAY 3:** "Off to the San Ignacio lagoon for our first day of whale watching. The girls were nervous at first but once they touched the first whale, that was it – they fell in love and couldn't wait to do it again the next morning."

**DAY 4:** "This was our best day of whale watching. We played with at least eight whales that morning and at one point we had four whales surrounding our boat (two mamas and two babies). That evening we went to Cuarenta to see the salt flats. It was incredible! It looked like snow but without the cold."

**DAY 5:** "We spent our last night at Mision Santa Maria in San Quintin. We took the opportunity to visit the famous Old Mill, making our last day a fun one before our drive back to the U.S. in the morning."

**DAY 6:** "Back to the U.S. through the Tijuana border crossing. We're already planning our next Baja escape!"



# ON OUR RADAR FOR MAY



**MAY 3**

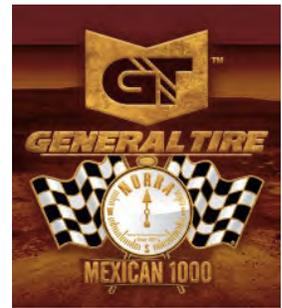
## Rosarito Ensenada Bike Ride

- This 50-mile fun ride is a biannual event with food, drinks and live music at the end

- The course will ride along the scenic toll road which is currently closed to car traffic
- [www.rosaritoensenada.org](http://www.rosaritoensenada.org)

## MAY 10-14 5th Annual General Tire NORRA Mexican 1000

- Fun, vintage-flavored rally race from Ensenada to Cabo San Lucas with a post party in Cabo
- [www.norra.com](http://www.norra.com)



## MAY 10 Gourmet Guadalupe Valley Winery Day Trip



- Join DBTC for an all-inclusive day trip as we take you to experience the best that Baja's wine region has to offer
- [bit.ly/1hoBZHN](http://bit.ly/1hoBZHN)

## MAY 11 Mother's Day (U.S.)

- Happy Mother's Day! With Mother's Day in Mexico falling the previous day on May 10<sup>th</sup>, there's no better way to celebrate than with a weekend in Baja with Mom.
- Still looking for the perfect gift? Try the DBTC Guadalupe Valley Trip on May 10<sup>th</sup>. It's a great excuse to treat yourself as well!



## MAY 23-25 Gastrovino Baja Food & Wine Festival

- Todos Santos

- Food and wine festival with live music, entertainment and a silent auction to benefit programs for local children
- [gastrovino.mx](http://gastrovino.mx)

May 24<sup>th</sup> & 25<sup>th</sup>, 2014



## MAY 24-25 Rosarito Art Fest

- This is always one of the best annual events in Rosarito with art stalls, crafts, food, drinks and live entertainment taking over the streets of the town
- [www.facebook.com/rosaritoartfest](http://www.facebook.com/rosaritoartfest)

## MAY 26 Memorial Day

- The unofficial start to summer is here!
- Memorial Day can be a very busy holiday weekend in Baja so make sure to get your reservations early. Don't forget to get your auto insurance and FMMs at Discover Baja before departing! The DBTC office will be closed May 24-26.



## MAY 31 Ensenada Baja Beerfest

- A day of craft beer, food and live music
- [www.facebook.com/ACABCoficial](http://www.facebook.com/ACABCoficial)

# BUEN PROVECHO: Finca Altozano, Valle de Guadalupe

By Jennifer Kramer  
[www.bajatheothercalifornia.com](http://www.bajatheothercalifornia.com)

It's no secret that Baja's wine region, Valle De Guadalupe (Guadalupe Valley), has become a mecca for people seeking delectable wine and culinary excellence. Likened by many as the next Napa Valley, the region is rapidly growing into that title with a wealth of new boutique wineries and restaurants with acclaimed chefs who flocked to the valley to open up their "country" eateries.

One of the most famous restaurateurs from Baja, Javier Plascencia, was not to be outdone. He and his family have numerous restaurants in Tijuana and San Diego, including Mision 19, Giuseppis, and Caesar's in Tijuana and Romesco in San Diego. Javier opened Finca Altozano in 2012 on Hillock Farm in the Guadalupe Valley as his country BBQ and it has quickly become a favorite of visitors to the valley.

Finca Altozano is clearly a place meant for enjoying life. You can't help spending an afternoon there and not thinking that life is great. The first thing you're aware of is how serenely beautiful and relaxing the space is. The restaurant is refreshingly open air and the stunningly simple and rustic decor puts everyone at ease. From the restaurant, you look out onto the vineyards on the property with the rest of the Guadalupe Valley as the background. There are areas around the property to lounge while sipping wine, enjoying the company of friends and taking in the views of the valley. Some of



Want to check out Finca Altozano yourself? Join us on our Gourmet Guadalupe Valley Winery Day trip on Saturday, May 10<sup>th</sup>! More info on the next page.

these spots are made to look like giant wine barrels. You can take stairs up to the top where you'll find a seating area and spectacular views to accompany your glass of wine.

Then there's the food in the restaurant that's so delicious and thoughtfully prepared you can't help but marvel over each bite. The food is all local, so the menu changes on a regular basis and is based on what's available from the orchards, farms and ranches in the Guadalupe Valley. The kitchen is open so you can watch the meat cooking on the barbecue and observe the chefs preparing the fresh ingredients.

Unlike many of the other upscale restaurants in the Guadalupe Valley that offer set courses, at

Finca Altozano, you're free to order whatever you like from the menu. The octopus appetizer was delightfully flavorful (dare I say, the best octopus I've ever had) as were the mushrooms that our server suggested but weren't even on the menu. The sophisticated blends of flavors and fresh ingredients generate new takes on Mexican classics. The lamb birria as the main course was deliciously savory and practically melted in your mouth. Local wines and craft beers round out the experience.

When you need to take a break from your regular routine and you're looking for an indulgent reminder of how great life can be, head to Finca Altozano.

[www.fincaaltozano.com](http://www.fincaaltozano.com)  
011-52-646-156-8045



# Gourmet Guadalupe Valley Winery Day Trip

MAY 10TH



## Come spend a day experiencing Mexico's Napa Valley with Discover Baja and Baja Custom Tours! Saturday, May 10th

Enjoy a day with us in Baja's Guadalupe Valley as we explore some of the best wineries, food and attractions that the region has to offer. Spend the day enjoying delicious wines, sweeping views of the valley, and gourmet dinner. We'll provide the round-trip transportation, a tour the new Museum of Wine and Vine, tastings at two boutique wineries, traditional Mexican lunch at a local restaurant, a local wine guide to explain everything in English and a gourmet dinner at Finca Altozano.

\$245 per person. For more detailed information:  
[wp.me/p3Dlyc-c7](http://wp.me/p3Dlyc-c7)

Call or email today to book your spot!  
[ask@discoverbaja.com](mailto:ask@discoverbaja.com) or 800.727.2252



### ***Trip includes:***

- Guided tour of the new Wine and Vine Museum
- Wine tasting at two wineries – Las Nubes and Adobe Guadalupe
- Traditional homemade, sit-down lunch
- Local wine expert
- Gourmet dinner at Javier Plascencia's Finca Altozano
- Round trip transportation from Discover Baja offices in San Diego
- Expedited border crossing

**By Carol Kramer**

For ages I had wanted to visit Baja Dark Skies in the Sierra de San Pedro Martir. The week after Christmas last year proved to be THE time. Reservations were made and we were on our way. We took the toll road---12 hours before it collapsed---and continued down Mex 1 to KM 140 where we turned-off at the village of Diaz Ordaz with the signs for San Telmo and San Pedro Martir National Park and Observatory. We followed the paved road past Meling Ranch to KM 67 and turned left. We passed through a gate and then the fun began.

Four-wheel drive is advised for the last six kilometers although we were told a Prius made it just fine. We were glad to have our trusty Explorer and definitely used her 4-wheel drive. In a couple of spots we needed a second attempt to climb to the top of rock covered slopes. There were also patches of snow and ice-- a Baja adventure at its best. Arriving at Rancho la Concepcion and meeting Mike Wirths and Pamela Weston made it all more than worthwhile.

Mike and Pam's gorgeous home and the delightful cabaña where we stayed are natural in every way. All energy is solar-powered and the two buildings are built of adobe bricks made on site. In addition to Mike and Pam's living space, which they share with three beautiful felines, the modern home has one bedroom with its own exit for guests. We chose to stay in the 575 square foot casita across the yard. It has two bedrooms, a bathroom, kitchenette and seating area, and

# Baja Dark Skies Inn



it accommodates four people. It is equipped with a propane heater, which we happily used. There is also space for camping on the property.

Since restaurants are nowhere close, we ate delicious meals fixed by Mike and Pam. Dinners included homemade pizza and roasted chicken. Breakfasts featured fresh eggs, juice and fruit. There is an emphasis on nature and ecological friendliness. Pam and Mick raise chickens, grow their own vegetables and fruit trees and were getting ready to add goats to their property.

The peace and quiet of the area is mesmerizing---a healing for the body and soul. You can be content just watching Condors flying overhead. We went on a hike with Pam and Mike through patches of snow to an old homestead of the native Kiliwa Indians. At sunset we climbed a hill in back of their house for a spectacular view of the sun setting over the Pacific Ocean.

Of course, the highlight of the visit was the astronomy show. Mike is a longstanding member of the Royal Astronomy Society of Canada, well

known for his lunar and planetary images published in several astronomy journals. He has built an observatory behind their house with a sliding roof so the sky is available for viewing. He has two telescopes an 18" and a 30" Starmaster Dobsonian. We just so happened to choose a clear night with no moon so the night sky was spectacular. We donned gloves, hats and heavy coats and gladly braved the cold to view and learn about stars, clusters, planets, constellations and galaxies. The next morning we used Mike's new Lunt 152mm Hydrogen alfa solar telescope to study the sun with its flares and sun spots. Viewing the posters on the walls of the observatory gives you a glimmer of the majesty of our immense and incredible world and of the cosmic miracle that we are all part of.

For more details about this magical place, check out their web site: [www.bajadarkskies.com](http://www.bajadarkskies.com). Baja Dark Skies is open from March 1<sup>st</sup> to Dec 31<sup>st</sup>, and they give Discover Baja members a free viewing of the night sky. This little bit of heaven is definitely a wonder of Baja---not to be missed.



# THE SPANISH MISSIONS ON THE CALIFORNIA PENINSULA: #21, San Vicente Ferrer (1780-1833)



San Vicente 1949. Photo by Marquis McDonald

## By David Kier

The San Vicente mission was founded on August 27, 1780 by Padre Miguel Hidalgo and Padre Joaquin Valero 20 leagues (about 50 miles) north of Santo Domingo. The location was well watered and at an important intersection of routes north to San Diego and east to Yuma.

Padre Luis Sales became resident missionary in 1781 and was there to 1787. A violent smallpox epidemic struck San Vicente in 1781. Padre Sales wrote that he saw many dead Indians in the fields. Sales would look into caves only to find children nearly dead from hunger, and not of the smallpox. He and his soldiers brought the children to the mission to be returned to good health. Once the disease ran its course, life began to return. In 1782, San Vicente had a native population of 83 and by 1787, the number grew to 317.

Hostile Indians required the creation of a *presidio* (fort) at San Vicente. Padre Sales had the mission complex enclosed by an 8 foot tall adobe wall, with towers. San Vicente had 8 to 10 soldiers to stand guard. Padre Sales made expeditions north to expand the mission system and fill the void

between San Vicente and San Diego. In 1787, Padre Sales founded the mission of San Miguel, 29 leagues (about 75 miles) north from San Vicente.

Padre José Estévez was in charge of the mission following Padre Sales until March of 1789. Padre Miguel Gallego then followed Estévez as resident missionary until July, 1794. The church building in 1793 was an adobe structure measuring 60 feet by 20 feet; the roof was made of tules.

Padre Tomás Valdellon succeeded Padre Gallego from October, 1793 to August, 1797. Padre Ramon Lopez replaced Valdellon and made entries in the books of record until April, 1806. In 1800, the population included 246 Indians. Most of the neophytes lived in their own *rancherías* and came to the mission on rotation for two weeks of instruction.

As at the other Dominican missions, many missionaries offered assistance to the resident padre and several Dominicans are included in the record books. Padre Pedro Gonzalez made some entries in 1808. The resident Dominican at San Vicente from 1808 to 1811 was Padre José Duro, followed by Padre Antonio Fernandez, who was there until November of 1816. Padre Antonio

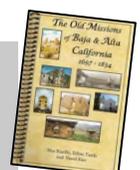
Menendez recorded two burials in 1817 and a Padre José Martinez recorded one in November, 1817.

In a letter dated Oct. 3, 1822, Padre Pineda of Santo Tomás wrote: *"the Father of San Vicente administers what is impossible, San Vicente, Santo Domingo, Rosario and San Fernando"*. Padre Felix Caballero was (also) at San Vicente in 1822 and perhaps through to May 27, 1828 when the book of records was closed. Padre Thomas Mansilla was stationed at San Vicente in 1829 with an Indian population of 142. Twenty years later, the number of native Indians had dropped to 7. Most books give the year 1833 for when the mission was abandoned. Records of the Dominican missions are incomplete.

The mission walls have been stabilized and are in a park-like setting created with walkways. A visit to this mission site is less than a mile off Highway One at Km. 88, south of Ensenada.

A footnote: While the Dominicans were establishing their first three missions in northern Baja California, the Franciscans were also busy and had opened three missions in Alta California in the same period, adding to the five they already founded there, before 1775.

**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.





# ASK A LOCAL: Todos Santos

**OUR LOCAL:** Elizabeth Day **TOWN:** Todos Santos **HOW LONG:** 12 years **WHY TODOS SANTOS:** My husband and I went to La Paz for vacation and took a drive to Todos Santos, if only to be able to tell a friend who kept suggesting it to us (we were considering moving to somewhere—not sure where—in Mexico for a six-month stint) that we had indeed checked it out. We hadn't even driven a block into the town when I said, "This is it. We're home." Our daughter in the car seat behind us was almost two, and I was five months pregnant with our son. My husband said, "Shouldn't we look around? Check it out before we decide?" The joint decision was made within a half hour of walking around this magical oasis in the desert. We fell in love with Todos Santos, and instead of staying only six months, we've called it home, sometimes part-time, sometimes full-time, for the past twelve years. **OCCUPATION:** Writer and Book Editor **HER BIO:** Elizabeth, an award-winning book editor, is the author of the inspirational novel, *Living with Gusto*, and the creator of the motivational website [PostcardsFromGusto.com](http://PostcardsFromGusto.com).



Photos by Zoe Day

**If you had to describe Todos Santos in three words, what would they be?** Authentic, Soulful, Tranquil

**What's the vibe of Todos Santos?** There's a surfer vibe, an artist vibe, a magical vibe that gets you believing anything is possible, and a back-to-core-basics vibe.

**Why do most people come to Todos Santos to visit?** A lot of people come to surf at Cerritos Beach, to check out the many art galleries in town, to visit the Hotel California, or because they heard from someone (like we did), "You have to check out Todos Santos."

**Best activities to enjoy in Todos Santos?** When people come to visit, we love taking them to Cerritos and Las Palmas for a picnic, water fun, and good old beach time. There's also horseback riding with Kaia Thompsen (our local horse whisperer), fishing, biking, surfing, hiking to the old port (stunning view), and walking around town.

**Any good street food?** Chilakos for steak tacos, La Duranguena for gorditas, Sinaloense for fish tacos.

Compa Chava for ceviche.

**Favorite sit-down restaurants?** La Esquina or Todos Santos Café for breakfast. La Copa for incredible gourmet tacos, sliders, and other tapas-style fare. Tre Galline for homemade pasta dishes. El Zaguán for fresh fish.

**What are some of the best hotels in the area?** Hotelito, Casa Tota, and of course Hotel California.

**What are the best beaches to visit in Todos Santos?** Cerritos and Las Palmas.

**Any popular nightlife or entertainment?** La Esquina has live music (depending on the time of year) on Thursday and weekend nights. Fantastic vibe. Fun for all ages.

**Annual events that are worth making a trip to Todos Santos for?** The Music Festival in January, run by Peter Buck of R.E.M., the Film Festival in February, and the Fiestas Tradicionales in October.

**Are there internet cafes or wifi spots in town?** Yes, and it's pretty easy to find them. Cafélix and Todos Santos Café are great,

friendly places to go to grab a coffee and freshly baked snack while checking email, etc.

**Any good shopping?** For vibrant, beautifully made clothes, shoes, and accessories, Étnica. For unique gifts, Mexican Soul. For books and local artistry, El Tecolote Bookstore.

**Things people shouldn't visit Todos Santos without seeing or doing?** Eat a mango, without using a knife to cut it, on the beach. Enjoy hot, freshly made tortillas from California Star Tortilleria.

**Your best insider tip about visiting Todos Santos?** Explore it on foot. And even if it pulls you out of your comfort zone at first, don't wear a watch and turn your phone off.

**What's the best time of year to visit?** Town's crowded, and there's a lot going on December through March. Any other time of year, you'll experience a quieter, less crowded Todos Santos. Most people opt not to visit in August and September because those are the hottest months and hurricane season.

**The best "local spot" in town?** La Esquina.



# SIERRA DE LA LAGUNA

By David Kramer

The Sierra de la Laguna had been a legend and a lure, growing in my imaginings for some time. The seed was planted years ago, under the huge and newly-built *palapa* restaurant on the beach at Cerritos. A middle-aged, expat 'bro' with tattoos and Oakley sunglasses that reflected the world as a fish-eye rainbow scene had been talking of all 'the sick waves' along the coast. 'But when it's flat the mountains are sick too.' He gestured in the other direction, towards the earthen spine of the peninsula, and spoke of a high elevation oasis with swimming holes, rock slides, and petroglyphs abounding.

That was the Sierra de la Laguna. And that is the legend that lived in my consciousness for so long. But that is not what you will read more about here. We did not find swimming holes, rock slides, nor petroglyphs. We hardly found water. And in lieu of petroglyphs the item of most interest that we found on the rocks were 'patches of fur' that turned out to be colonies of social spiders. But *de todos modos*, some ten years after that afternoon at Cerritos...

I was driving solo down MEX 1 into Baja California Sur early February.

The prior 10 days had been spent with exceptional swell along the central coast. Days melding into dreams melding into days of surfing time-bending waves. I would have stayed longer, but a sea mite rash akin to a poison oak reaction had progressively worsened to a degree where I would forgo pointbreak perfection in hopes of an itch-free night of sleep.

I'm not quite sure how to explain it, so I won't, but a scenario ensued that had me traveling with a mixed band of Mexican/Spanish/French-canadian/El Salvadorian/Gringo hippies, gypsies, and expats... quite a suitable sample of the transplant subculture one will find magnetized to the southern tip of the peninsula. There had been talk of incorporating the Sierra de la Laguna into our exploits. I seized the opportunity as a means to validate the legend.

The plan was to access the mountains from the west starting at a *rancho* near El Pescadero and hike a few miles up the arroyo to a saddle in the mountain crest. We heard stories that on the far side of the saddle lay lush pools of water and we thought the shores of these pools would make a fine camp. As a wildlife biologist, I was enthused by the prospect of exploring the ecology of a rarely-accessed region.

We would hike down the following day. That was the plan.

Naturally, not everyone in our contingent was game for a backpacking expedition into an unknown area, so we were whittled down to a group of four. We prepared provisions of beans, avocados, tortillas, nuts, rum, and tequila, packed packs, and made an early morning dirt road rumble to El Sacrificio, the private ranch of a friend-of-a-friend at the foot of the *sierra*.

*Sierra* translates as 'mountain range', but it also means 'saw', and this is an appropriate representation of the skyline broken between mountain and sky that suspended above the trailhead. The peaks of Picacho and Salsipuedes were just as jagged and raw as any rock monolith that has ever drawn a wayfarer to the mountains.

*Laguna* translates as 'lagoon' or 'lake'. The heart of the Sierra de la Laguna, and where most visitors visit, lay to the north of where we were. The highest peaks of the range are encountered there, as well as pines and a grand meadow in the footprint of an ancient lake, for which the *sierra* was named.

I mentioned the trailhead earlier. It wasn't so much a trailhead, as a place next to a large, dubious cage where the beaten road narrowed to only permit passage by *bestia* or foot. Being without *bestia* (mule/horse...) we strapped on our packs and started up the trail.

Plumerias overhung a rock-sided and deep box canyon that dropped below our left hands. I thought the plumerias rare and beautiful despite the facts that they are quite common in the Cape region and were not flaunting fragrant flowers in the middle of the dry season. The trail continued to the rancho, El Sacrificio, where there were a couple rustic cabins and corrals along the dry arroyo that rose up to the mountains above us.

Continued on page 10 9





**Flora and fauna of the Sierra de la Laguna. On the bottom left, a “patch of fur” that turned out to be a colony of social spiders. All photos by David Kramer.**

I mentioned El Sacrificio. This obviously translates as 'The Sacrifice' and aptly so, at least in regards to our excursion. The distinct trail we had followed to the ranch quickly deteriorated into choosing the best cattle trail, trudging up sandy arroyo bottoms, scrambling over boulders, and negotiating our way up or around the towering rock walls of dry waterfalls. What we estimated at only around three miles as the crow flies, from the ranch to the saddle, was taking hours of sweating and climbing in the midday sun.

But the setting was spectacular. We climbed out of desert thornscrub into verdant canyons populated with a peculiar mix of palm, oak, and cactus. Wild figs clung to cliff faces with white tangles of roots feeling out the rock crevices. Evergreen oaks reached out to offer sweet shade under leaves larger than one's hand.

When we had inquired about the area before leaving civilization, locals talked of our route as having been a common means for missionaries to cross the Sierra de la Laguna in the days of lore. And we found evidence of their passing. Feral guavas were sporadically intermixed within dense thickets of vegetation on the riverbed

of the canyon, as were grape vines with stocks up to half a foot in diameter.

The bird population changed in turn with the vegetation and soon we were within a demographic similar to that of the Sierra Nevada or Rocky Mountains: Black-throated Grey Warblers, Western Tanagers, Lazuli Buntings, and Warbling Vireos. When we reached the mountain crest there were even Band-tailed Pigeons.

We did finally reach the mountain crest and a flat clearing on the saddle where we set our packs down. In all of the ascent we had only encountered a few murky trickles of water and with our canteens nearly drained from the four hour trek, this became of concern. Thus it was prioritized to find these supposed pools of water on the eastern slope of the saddle, so I dropped down into that far valley to scout. I followed a dizzying circuit of trails, investigated a number of draws, got lost, and bushwhacked back to the saddle without finding the pools.

The sun was setting and an incredible scene splayed out before us. To the west, the saddle fell off

into the arroyo, the desert, and the sunset hues, to where the sun kissed the Pacific Ocean many miles distant. To the east of the saddle, a thick carpet of oak and palm bowled out below the crag of Cerro Picacho and an almost full, gibbous moon lay on a lavender horizon over the Sea of Cortez.

Someone volunteered to hike down to the closest trickle of water to boil a few potfuls and replenish our bottles. The rest of us got a small fire lit and started on dinner. The night progressed as most of our nights did at that time: food, spirits, and stars, accompanied by campfire serenades from the ukulele and *charango* (analogous to a South American mandolin). We spread the coals and covered them with sand to make a heated bed and slept to the tremolo lullabies of Western Screech Owls.

The descent was normal: losing ourselves on dwindling cattle trails; bushwhacking through thorn thickets; dropping the ukulele off a cliff, spotting a wild boar and ample puma scat... normal. We left the Sierra de la Laguna without having found what others had found. But we had found what we had wanted. Adventure awaits wherever you choose to look for it.

# A NEW SOCIAL NETWORK FOR RVERS

RVillage, a new social website for RVers, recently launched to enable people to connect with fellow travelers, find people staying nearby and easily make new friends even when only staying in one place for a few weeks or months at a time. In addition to helping users connect with other travelers, the site allows users to find RV parks as well as RV-friendly businesses and services, all based on location. There are currently RV Parks listed all over the U.S. and Canada. Baja sites are coming soon and there are a few Baja groups already started. The best part is that it's all free. [www.rvillage.com](http://www.rvillage.com)



## Why We Baja: Member Travel Photos



“The purpose of the trip was to visit San Ignacio and the whales. We drove down in two days and stayed at Kuyima camp, where we rented two tents. The delicious fish we ate in their restaurant was so fresh, I think I actually saw it jiggling on my plate. Our first experience with the whales was unbelievable. We spent the whole time just petting and enjoying them. The second day we watched in amazement as one whale after another breached.

The whale trip should be on everyone's "bucket list." It touches your soul. I had driven down to Cabo for the first time in 1973 and I thought Baja was a wonder of the world then and I haven't changed my mind. It is magical.” -Noreen Walsh  
(for more about Noreen's trip with her fellow Hot Chicks, see [discoverbaja.wordpress.com/category/trip-reports/](http://discoverbaja.wordpress.com/category/trip-reports/))

*Why do you Baja? Is it for the taco stand you can't get enough of? The father/son fishing trips? The encounters with nature and wildlife that you can't get at home? Or the peaceful moments before the sun goes down when the whole world is aglow? Email your "Why We Baja" photo moment to [jen@discoverbaja.com](mailto:jen@discoverbaja.com) and we may publish it in the next newsletter. Or, if you Instagram, follow us @discoverbaja and tag your photo with #whywebaja*

**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. The seller is Alberto Cota Murillo, whose cell phone number in Loreto is 613-114-7751.