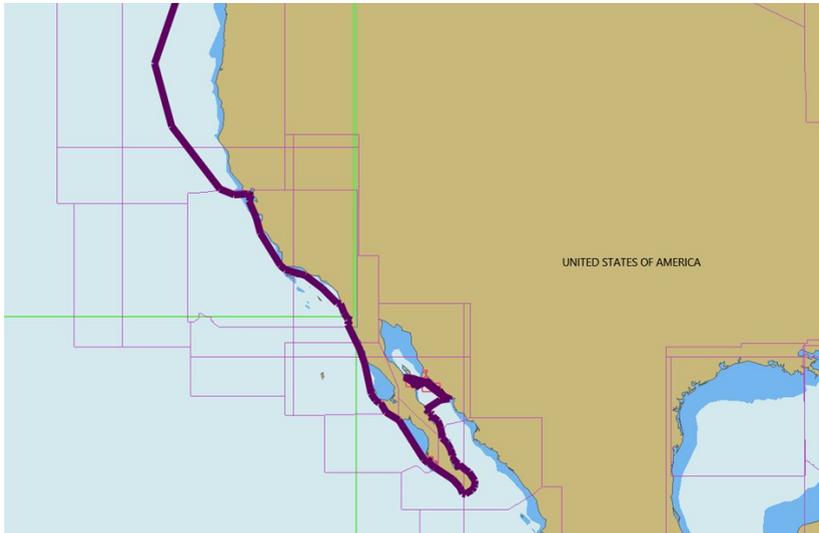


With Best Explorer - 2014 From Canada to Mexico

Best Explorer Logbook 2014 - From Canada to Mexico

From Wednesday 26 February to Sunday 16
March. From Canoe Cove to San Francisco.



The small port of Canoe Cove is located right at the arrival of the ferry coming from Vancouver and Best Explorer is visible from the road, just landed, just shielded by a backdrop of fir trees.

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The weather is pleasant, but it's still cool and there's some snow around here. The Best Explorer is in good condition and the heating is working. In the following days there will be some work to do for the normal maintenance before launching and for some revision and adjustment of things that have broken down, as always happens.



Figure 2: Hull maintenance

In the meantime, Marco, Paolo, Bernard and Jean Claude arrive, who give me a hand to disassemble, reassemble and paint. A small problem arises, which quickly becomes a bigger problem.

Marco does not speak French and an immediate tension arises between him and Paolo. It's not something we're used to, but some tension between our traveling companions has to happen sooner or later. The skipper is always involved in delicate situations because conflicts on board can be dangerous for everyone's safety.

With Best Explorer - 2014 From Canada to Mexico
Marco disappears for a day, which he dedicates to meditation.
When he returns, he tells me an excuse, which I take for good, but
he decides to stay.

I'm anxious, but I believe I have adequately concealed it.



Figure 3: Best Explorer during launching

Once the boat is launched, we will leave for a couple of days
around the area, which will be used to test the systems and verify
the crew's endurance.

A thrill at the start: just outside the port the engine shuts down
and the boat, caught by the strong tide current, drifts rapidly towards
a group of rocks. I have to drop the anchor, but the winch does not
start. A few excited moments follow, then I manage to unlock the
chain and anchor the boat a few meters away from the disaster.
These are jokes of the tide.

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The cause was a simple mistake: the gasoline supply tap, which was left over from the old engine's installation and is now worthless, was unintentionally closed during the routine maintenance of the engine. The diesel cut-off turns off the engine automatically after approximately 10 minutes



Figure 4: The forest around Annette Inlet

It's the first time that's happened to me, and it took me a while to figure out the cause, which wasn't easily recognizable due to something that happened some time ago. In the future, I will encounter this failure again, and I will be able to solve the issue in just a few minutes after recalling today's experience.

I replace the winch switches before I leave. We set sail and now we have the chance to reach a charming cove in a wild Canadian setting of fir forests.

The trip has a calming effect on the mood.

With Best Explorer - 2014 From Canada to Mexico

On Tuesday, March 11 we leave for good and go to complete the entry formalities in the United States at Friday Harbor, almost empty of boats, but manned by customs officers who have a reputation of being a pain in the neck.



Figure 5: Friday Harbor

That's how it is, especially from someone who, with a pale complexion and a paunch that strains his shirt like a typical bureaucrat, with an Italian surname, responds to a demonstration of courtesy from us with poorly suppressed contempt and condescension. What a difference from the friendly and even warm welcome received in Alaska!

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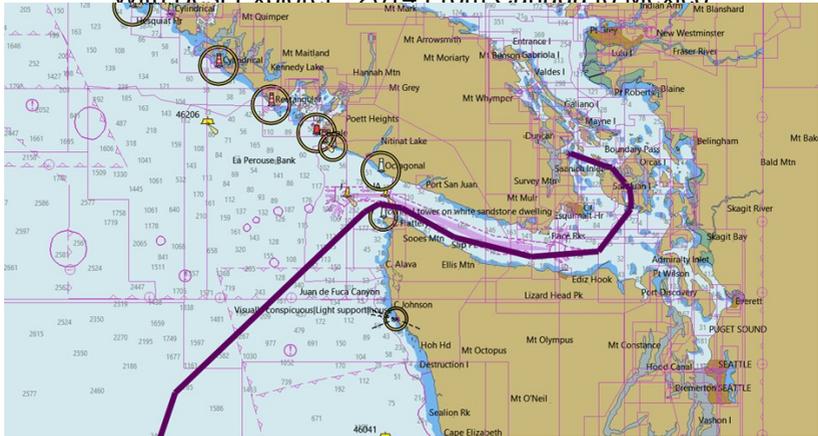


Figure 6: Our track exiting the Juan de Fuca Strait

We exit into the ocean from a very wide channel, the Juan da Fuca strait.

The ocean is calm and I aim to stay about twenty miles offshore, because the coast up to San Francisco is dangerous. It's been three days of uneventful navigation on the long northwest swell, with very little wind in gloomy weather.

Just entering the Golden Gate is alerady exciting. There are three approach routes. I made the choice to go through the Bonita Channel near the north coast because of the thick fog and to avoid any ships. The long swell rises over the shoal that protects the entrance to the open sea (Four Fathom Bank), forming impressive breakers, even more threatening because they appear whitish and indistinct in the fog. While on the left, we see the dark rocks of the Marin Peninsula nearby that reflect the waves and their roar. We pass through the calm canal between breakers and rocks.



Illustrazione 1: Passing under the Golden Gate Bridge!

In the fog, the mournful cries of the buoy sirens also resonate. We move blindly, always without radar, and keep an eye on the AIS until the pylon of the bridge appears very close, and immediately after the bridge itself raises above us.

A mythical passage! As if by magic, under the bridge, in a few meters, the air becomes clear and fresh and San Francisco reveals itself before our eyes under a shining sun!

Nicoletta booked us a place at the marina of the famous Pier 39, which welcomes us with a very narrow entrance crossed by a strong current that forces me to proceed with the bow angled 15° from the route. The sea lions in the port cover the first two docks and welcome us with a chorus of barks, roars, and burps, and an odor that is not exactly violets.

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Illustrazione 2: Best Explorer and the sea lions resting at Pier 39

We have arrived! There are only a few boats in the public sector and it's easy to moor, although it can be rough due to the waves from external traffic. Great! Alcatraz with its abandoned prison in front of the entrance reminds us that appearances (of serenity) are often deceiving...

With Best Explorer - 2014 From Canada to Mexico
Monday, March 17 to Tuesday, March 25.

From San Francisco to Ensenada, Mexico.

I had already travelled to San Francisco by plane many years ago. Unfortunately, we have little time now because a group of friends will arrive in Mexico on March 26th and we have to hurry to meet them.

The day after our arrival is Saint Patrick's Day, and there are many green clothes around, some of which are very interesting.



Illustrazione 3: At the Saint Patrick's party you wear something green

We disperse after purchasing supplies and we all enjoy the chance to relax as we please.

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Paolo and I the next day are attracted by a World War II submarine right opposite Pier 39. We go to visit it, getting a deep impression of the incredible narrowness of the environments.



Illustrazione 4: The II World War submarine

It is difficult to quickly find a nautical supplies store for the small amount we need, but we can remedy something.

Marco disappeared for a while and then announced that he wants to go home. I really think he can't stand the company. It doesn't happen often, but this time it did, even if he insists, diplomatically, on saying that he has problems at home. I stand by him in front of others.

In reality, the company is a bit edgy, although I have no problems with them. I have known Paolo and Bernard for a long time and have already sailed with both of them. Jean-Claude is a quiet

With Best Explorer - 2014 From Canada to Mexico and taciturn man, but Marco has not been able to bond with any of the three.



Illustrazione 5: Towards San Diego there is wind every now and then

We leave on Wednesday, March 19 with good weather and a light stern breeze, which after granting us a nice sailing trip from the Golden Gate, is no longer able to push us.

Along the California coast, the wind comes and goes, so we have to hoist the sails in fits and starts. I briefly hesitate but then give up the idea of stopping at the popular Santa Catalina Island in front of Los Angeles. We wouldn't have time for a reasonable visit and entering an unfamiliar berth or marina in the evening is still an unnecessary stress.

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The AIS signals me to a cruise ship that is distant and far from our route, yet it chooses to contact me by radio to agree on a safe passage. It is comforting.

We arrive in San Diego at night, where we have to complete departure procedures from the USA. The port, behind a long sandy island, is huge and very crowded, but the customs landing is right at the entrance. Everything is set up to book procedures automatically, but for those who are not used to it, the instructions are rather obscure and complicated. We managed to book anyway, but we received a reprimand the next day from two officers. As usual, outside of Alaska, they are unpleasant, presumptuous, and threatening. Maybe it's all a show, but the news of 2026 says otherwise. In fact, we are able to get away with it quickly.

After a short stretch towards the port of Ensenada in Mexico, we arrive at the mooring before lunch. The Mexican bureaucracy is relatively complex, but the offices are all located in the same building. The officials are courteous and the documents are completed quite quickly. Having had to hand over the rifle in Canada last year took a heavy weight off my mind. Here in Mexico, they are fiercely opposed to the importation of firearms. You can see that they already have too many of their own!

The people's appearance is delightful: they all look cheerful and beautiful, unlike the USA where the dominant perception is that they are being oppressed by life and obese.

We are having a Mexican dinner with a welcome accompaniment of mariachi guitars. Tomorrow our friends will arrive and we will continue south with the hope of observing grey whales.

With Best Explorer - 2014 From Canada to Mexico
Wednesday, March 26 to Wednesday, April
2nd. From Ensenada to Magdalena Bay, Baja
California

Nicoletta, Raffaella and Giulio have arrived safely.

They come for a brief period to witness the grey whales. It is a somewhat risky program because the season for these cetaceans is coming to an end and the route is long. Grey whales enter the coastal lagoons of Baja California, the long Mexican peninsula, at the end of the year and leave with the newborns around the end of March to return to the north.

In the meantime, I have to deal with several navigation problems: the whale lagoons are mostly labyrinths of shallow water without depth indications. All the cartography of this part of Mexico is very approximate. The almost seven hundred miles of coast in front of us are almost without shelter, and my three friends must return within a week.

I wonder where the hell along this desert coast I'll be able to land them? We certainly won't make it to Cabo San Lucas, the first port.

We were able to enjoy a very nice sail because the wind was favourable, at times even quite strong.

I rule out trying to enter a couple of lagoons known for sightings and instead head directly for Magdalena Bay, the southernmost one. That, as well as being large, deep, and well-protected, is closer to La Paz, where the airport is located.

The coast from the distance we keep is rather monotonous. The long navigation requires a stop and Turtle Bay is an excellent, rather protected anchorage with regular depths. At the entrance, Kelp Point lives up to its name with one of the most extensive fields of these enormous algae. It should also host sea otters and sea lions, but having to keep our distance, we don't see any.



Illustrazione 6: The sea in front of Kelp Point is covered in... kelp!

After moving away from the coast and cutting straight through a wide curve, we finally spot one of the whales we wanted in the distance.

On Sunday, we arrived at Magdalena Bay, protected by long headlands and islands, and were greeted by two whales right at the entrance.

We anchor in front of a poor fishing village whose fishermen come to ask us for some painkillers and whom we ask to arrange for the disembarkation of our friends the day after tomorrow in the nearby small town of San Carlos. The shores are red with galateas, small crustaceans that for some reason have come to die there. Certainly not because of pollution, which is non-existent.



Illustrazione 7: The mountains at the entrance to Bahia Magdalena

The next day, we managed to take a nice close-hauled sailing trip inside the large lagoon and observe another whale.

Early in the morning of Wednesday, April 2nd, the fisherman comes to pick up Nicoletta Raffaella and Giulio who will later tell me that they enjoyed a very close farewell greeting from a grey whale near the boat!

The four of us who are left immediately set sail for Cabo San Lucas.

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Illustrazione 8: The strip of gelatae (crustaceans) reddens the shore



Illustrazione 9: Galateas: unluckily are not edible!

With Best Explorer - 2014 From Canada to Mexico
Wednesday 2 to Thursday 3 April. From
Magdalena Bay to Cabo San Lucas, Baja
California

There is a current at the exit of Magdalena Bay and the sea is rough, but when the current weakens, the sea calms down as well. It is a phenomenon that we have now observed many times and that is almost unknown to us Mediterraneans, but it can become truly dangerous. I will never tire of reminding you.

The temperature, which had been chilly until now, has finally become pleasant, and for the first time, we can describe the night as sweet.



Illustrazione 10: The coastal dunes and behind them cacti

This last stretch is how I imagined it: the coast is fronted by a sequence of high sand dunes that remind us that this is a real desert.

Evidently, the American tourists who flock to Cabo San Lucas have not noticed, because among the crowding of condominiums, absolutely incongruous in the midst of such wild nature, are very green and duly watered golf courses.

The small port of the Cape, very dangerous in case of cyclones, is hidden inside a cove behind a couple of stacks, beautiful but of undeserved fame, doubling which we must watch out for the numerous fishermen who come out at full throttle.

The marina is very modern. We will only stop here for a short time to complete the entry formalities, which are necessary at every

port in Mexico, and to disembark Jean Claude, who is returning to Europe.

Upon his departure, it was confirmed to me that he was my silent enemy in the cockpit. I have the habit of finishing the maneuver lines with a figure-of-eight knot, which I regularly find undone every time I go out and which I meticulously re-knot. Our war went on underwater for the entire cruise without us declaring it, but now it's over! The knots remain!

Cabo San Lucas is not a place where I will ever go on vacation, as it is full of people looking for artificial entertainment. Along the road parallel to the port, every two shops have one that sells Viagra and Cialis with life-size posters (for men and women). The portentous effects of these products sold without a prescription are explicitly shown in unequivocal photos by them...

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Next stop: La Paz, with the hope of soon rediscovering the mysterious Sea of Cortez, full of animals and wildness, which I remember from about ten years ago.

With Best Explorer - 2014 From Canada to Mexico
Friday 4 to Sunday 6 April. From Cabo San
Lucas to the surroundings of La Paz, Sea of
Cortez

Humpback whales, so many!

Some jump out of the water: a lovely welcome to the Sea of Cortez.

Regrettably, the wind is weak and from the stern, requiring us to use the engine.

A series of passages were prohibited when I rented a boat from a notorious and tricky large charter company when I went sailing to La Paz some years ago. One of them is situated in the south and leads to the Bay of La Paz's entrance.

In their partial defense, the nautical charts of this sea are very old and in many cases completely incorrect. They provided us with only one plastic chart made for fishing. We will revisit this topic. Above all, the customers of that company, the Americans, proved to be inept in the vast majority.

The wide passage mentioned above has signals, but they are only useful if you have direct knowledge of the seabed.

However, proceeding with caution, it is not difficult to stay in deeper waters areas. In reality, we were able to pass without any problems.

Recognizing the area after so many years was a challenge for me, but I remembered something, particularly the entrance to the lagoon behind the sandbar that safeguards the city, which was a bit complex.

Fortunately, the only places where the nautical charts are reliable are the approaches to the ports, which have been evidently updated and regulated with the GPS coordinates.

Our stop here is brief, even though the small town is pleasant.



Illustrazione 12: The statue of the mermaid with the dolphin

We leave heading north, with some difficulty because the wind crosses us against the mooring pier. Best Explorer has its idiosyncrasies when maneuvering in ports, but with the help of a shore rope, we manage by exiting the stern first.

An unpleasant close hauled course with a confused sea disturbs us a bit, but the journey to Isla Espiritu Santo, the southernmost one protecting the bay, is only fifteen miles and the anchorage on a beautiful white sand seabed, behind a couple of islets, little more than rocks covered with cactus, Isla Gallo and Isla Gallina, is easy.

We relax, finally enjoying the magical atmosphere of these places. Nearby there is only the boat of a solitary fisherman who collects his nets without caring about us. The sunset gave Paolo, the only lucky one, the vision of the green ray, the rare luminous phenomenon lasting only a moment.

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Illustrazione 13: Anchored in front of the red basalts of Isla del Espiritu Santo

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Illustrazione 14: The cacti cover Isla Ballena

With Best Explorer - 2014 From Canada to Mexico
Monday 7 to Wednesday 9 April. From Isla del
Espiritu Santo to Honeymoon Cove, Sea of
Cortez

The destination of our transfer navigation to Mexico is Guaymas, a city and a port on the eastern coast of the Sea of Cortez at a more northern latitude. There is an important reason to go north: the tropical cyclones, which also lash the Pacific and frequently pass over the southern part of Baja California.

Guaymas is statistically outside of their trajectory. We have more than enough time to reach it and along our route there are several interesting destinations that I already know in part.

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Illustrazione 15: A thrilling close hauled sailing

So we move in small steps, and the next one takes us to Isla San Francisco.

We have a north wind of fifteen knots which would be perfect for a good close hauled sailing, but some of the fun is ruined by the short, choppy and unpleasant sea that we encounter, perhaps due to non-obvious currents.

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Illustrazione 16: The bay of Isla San Francisco

Here, years ago we saw for the first time the manta rays, rather devil fish, jumping out of the water. The show, although less frequent, is repeated this time too. Who knows what their motivations are!

Here in this season, the wind blows mostly from the north and, although not frequent, there are shelters. The bay south of the island offers a good anchorage, and we anchor there to our liking.

The next day, with an at times strong wind, we wait to leave and when it subsides we go, always close hauled, to the small bay of San Evaristo, where we are lucky enough to find a not too exposed corner among the many boats at anchor.

I gave up anchoring in the fairly open roadstead south of the Isla San José, in front of San Evaristo. It is very scenic and with an extensive and interesting mangrove swamp (La Amortajada – i.e.

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“the shroud”, a name perhaps due to the long, very white beach)
where I had already been because the weather did not convince me.

At night the water around the boat teems with fish similar to mullet that become visible by the phosphorescence they cause.

The next day I head towards Isla Danzante, which takes its name from the Indians who frequented it, avoiding the facing cove of Puerto Escondido, splendidly secluded, but now ruined by a modern marina.



Illustrazione 17: A school of playful dolphins to the north of Isla San José

To the north of Isla San José we are reached and surrounded by hundreds of playful dolphins, as I had already witnessed in this area. It is always a joy for the eyes and the spirit! Even the mantas seem to enjoy jumping out of the water!

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The Sea of Cortez does not disappoint me. My companions are equally delighted. These are waters that require attention because all the maps have incorrect GPS coordinates and sometimes they are also completely wrong. Unfortunately, the mini bay of exceptional charm and with the fascinating name of Honeymoon Cove where I was hoping to anchor is already occupied by another boat and we have to anchor next to it.

With Best Explorer - 2014 From Canada to Mexico
Thursday 10 to Friday 11 April. From
Honeymoon Cove to Santa Rosalia, Sea of
Cortez

Sailing from our anchorage to our left the Sierra de la Giganta, a long bastion of rocks towering along this entire coast, turns red with the dawn sun that is rising behind the dark line of the hills of the coast on the other side of the Sea of Cortez, clearly visible in the clear air.



Illustrazione 18: The spectacular sunrise behind the mountains of the distant state of Sonora

Our destination is the small town of Santa Rosalia about one hundred and twenty miles further north. The only shelters in

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between are located in Conception Bay, a pocket in the coast
located about eighty miles north.

The coast up to there is straight and deserted, less spectacular
than the one further south as the mountains move away from the
sea.

Fortunately for us, since yesterday the wind from the north has
stopped and in its absence, forcing us to motor, it nevertheless saves
us a painful and long close hauled sailing that would certainly have
engaged us for more than twenty-four hours.

The coast from here on is unknown to me and both I and my
friends are busy observing its desert nature, so different from the
cold and wooded northern coasts we travelled at the beginning of
our cruise.

A few rare dolphins show themselves, indifferent to our
passage. When we arrive in the evening inside Conception Bay to
look for shelter from any northern gusts well inside, which will not
arrive, we must pay attention to the variable seabed that, as always,
is indicated here in a very approximate way.

In the bay where we anchor there are some houses, perhaps
North American tourists are welcome here.

The next day, still in the absence of wind, the navigation
proceeds cautiously avoiding shallows and passing closely over a
rocky barrier that extends south of Isla San Marcos, marred by
gypsum mines that raise a great dust cloud.

A few miles later we enter the simple and semi-derelict port of
Santa Rosalia, docking at the solitary piers of the Fonatur, the state-
owned company that owns several ports and of which in time we will
become good customers.

It's early and we take a tour of the small town among very
narrow streets and very poor but colorful houses.

There are many people around controlled by pick-ups full of
soldiers armed to the teeth that pass up and down continuously.

There is a wrought iron church built by Eiffel for an exhibition, the one who built the Eiffel tower as well, which was then bought and transported here by the mine owner for the benefit of his workers. The mines are now disused.

The vultures perch on the port palm trees and the pelicans on the piers, clearly awaiting the return of the fishermen. The port is half in shambles and almost empty: what the heck will they do here to live?

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Illustrazione 20: A xylophone player carries his instrument

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Illustrazione 21: The interior of the Eiffel wrought iron church



From Saturday 12 to Sunday, April 13. From Santa Rosalia to Guaymas, Sea of Cortez

We leave at 2 am to be able to arrive in Guaymas in the afternoon. We have to cross the Sea of Cortez in east north east direction a little diagonally for a distance of about a hundred miles.

We set sail with a sustained wind from the west and a very dark night. We pay close attention to the fishermen who may not display lights and whose frequently dubious sobriety we have been warned about.

About twenty-five miles away, with the wind having dropped almost completely, we leave the Isla Tortuga well to starboard, on which no lights can be seen, to avoid any rocks and shallows to its northwest. It is a volcanic island and on the coast north of Santa Rosalia there is indeed another large volcano, the semi-extinct and black Tres Virgenes.



Illustrazione 23: The family of sperm whales

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It's a shame not to stop and explore around here a bit, a regret I feel very frequently. I know it's not possible, but I would be much happier if I could deepen my knowledge of the various places I visit- It's a desire that would require living multiple existences to reconcile it with the number of desirable destinations!

The crossing soon becomes interesting. First, we encounter the remains of a recently dead dolphin, then the sadness of that sight is dispelled by the encounter with a large family of sperm whales that is heading across our route.

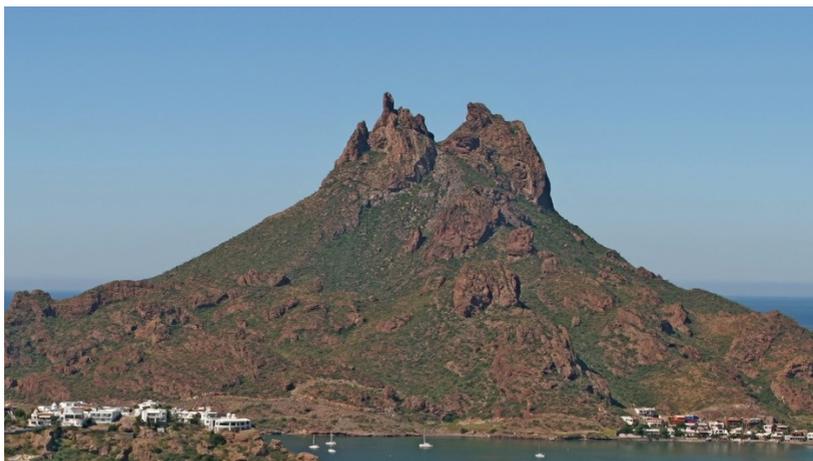


Illustrazione 24: The Tetas de Cabra (Goat's Tits)

It is definitely worth to follow them at a safe distance, so as not to disturb them. Not at all: they are the ones approaching us, curious like all cetaceans are. They leave smoothly all together, there is also a young one among them.

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We enjoy their company for a while, then, reluctantly, we resume our route .

Uncertain about the actual location of Guaymas (remember that the charts are unreliable) I head for a certain reference point, located near the tourist port of San Carlos. It is a steep mountain with an unmistakable double peak called Tetas de Cabra (Goat's Teats). The name says it all.

The coast is not clearly visible because the air is hazy and the sky is covered by a uniform gray blanket, but I can identify it anyway.

The sea becomes alive with dolphins, sea lions and splashes by the many fish, even large ones, that jump out of it.

When I am sure of our position I turn west and enter the Gulf of Guaymas, rounding the majestic cliff of Cape Haro with its white lighthouse on top.

Here the chart becomes perfect and the entrance is easy, except for the usual doubts that arise from the difficulty of connecting what you see with what you read.

We end up moored at another pier of the Fonatur. It will be my point of reference for the whole summer and the beginning of next year.

The next day I rent a car and take Paolo and Bernard to catch the plane in Hermosillo, a inland city almost as big as Turin about a hundred kilometers from here. Desert, cactuses, Mexican food, mariachi, in short, a goodbye, but less sad than one might fear.

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From Monday 14 to Wednesday 23 April.

Guaymas and Sonora coast, Sea of Cortez

Saturday 19 April. Nicoletta arrives with a group of friends: Silvia, Barbara, Margherita and Lucia .

I spent the week waiting them engaged in various small maintenance jobs and in an exploration of the area by land. I became familiar with some of the customs procedures, I took a look at one of the storage areas without identifying the winter storage one and I went to see Puerto San Carlos, a little further north, which is a modern marina used mainly by motor boats for sport fishing.

There, however, there is the fuel distributor that also provides drinking water: that of the Guaymas marina is not recommended.

It's hot, but quite bearable.

Sunday 20 we leave directly for San Carlos and already in the short spectacular journey the Sea of Cortez makes itself known. Apart from the vivid red, ochre and black colors of the overhanging rocks of the coast, the sea is alive with pelicans and dolphins.

We moor to a buoy in the well-sheltered bay in front of the marina with the water teeming with phosphorescent fish in the dark of night. One even gets fished the next morning.

We move a little further north, beyond the Tetas de Cabra, where there is another marina that will be useful later, but we anchor outside in the shelter of a tongue of rocks that cuts in half. Algodenes Bay The winds this season are mainly from the northwest and even if it has always been calm these days here we are protected.

We take the opportunity to go ashore with the dinghy and treat ourselves to an aperitif: this is vacation! After stocking up, we move in small stages towards north exploring the coast.

There is an island three miles offshore. It is steep, long and narrow, it is worth going to see what it is like. It is called San Pedro Nolasco and is a nature reserve. With the usual caution to avoid

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surprises, we approach until we almost touch the rocks: the coast plunges straight into the cobalt blue water.



Illustrazione 25: A sleeping sea lion

The waters are crowded with sea lions, some of whom rest on the few rocks precariously snatched from the cliff. I proceed at minimum speed both to enjoy the show to the fullest and to cause as little disturbance as possible. The sea lions wait for us to get within a few meters to calmly move away from our route. One though is sleeping soundly and wakes up only at the last moment, while I am already stopping: it is terrified, he lets out a hoarse cry and dives in disarray so funny that it makes us laugh.

The island is not even suitable for a short stop: the coasts are too steep to offer possibilities of anchorage and plunge immediately.

Right in front though there is a well-protected bay with a beautiful sandy bottom that we take advantage of for a lunch stop, Bahia San Pedro, and then we proceed further on to an improvident anchorage open to the northwest, which will force us to escape early in the morning due to the unpleasant arrival of wind and waves from

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the northwest. We end up anchoring further on, cheered by a spectacular coast, in a precarious indentation of the coast: Las Cadenas. But the sea by now has calmed down.



Illustrazione 26: Best Explorer anchored in Las Cadenas

We go ashore and are greeted by cactus and parched bushes that perfectly embody the nature of the Sonora desert that surrounds us and on which we move, prompting us to speak in hushed tones.



Illustrazione 27: Thorns and cacti

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Illustrazione 28: Parched, isn't it?

With Best Explorer - 2014 From Canada to Mexico

Thursday April 24th. Towards Isla Tiburon, Sea of Cortez

Isla Tiburon, about fifty miles from our anchorage, seems like a good destination, even without knowing in advance anything about it: between the island and the coast there is a passage in the shape of an inverted V that should offer good shelter from winds coming from most of the quadrants.

While studying the route I see that there is a long stretch of coast with very shallow seabed, between two and three meters, extending in front of the shore which is as well very low there: these are the San Juan Bautista plains which seem to be the terminal part of a river that who knows how long ago drained the waters of what is now the Sonora desert.

Today there is no wind and, counting on the shallow draft that the boat has with the keel raised, I decide to try to pass over it, with caution.

The rocky cape that sheltered us last night gives immediately way to a monotonous plain that seems cultivated, even if it is difficult to realize it from the sea. About halfway to Tiburon we reach the shallows.

I could keep offshore, but the water is transparent and I trust that I can spot any shoals in time, counting also on the forward looking sonar and the on presence of numerous small fishermen boats intent on some form of strange fishing.

In the water we begin to spot a quantity of completely unusual blue jellyfish. We stop to catch a couple of them with a bucket: they are hemispherical with a diameter of about ten centimeters and have short tentacles, never seen before. I will find out much later that these are "blue cannonball" jellyfish (*Stomolophus meleagris*) and I will be told that the fishermen around here catch them to dry and sell them in Japan.



Illustrazione 29: Blue Cannonball Jellyfish

The seabed is interesting: the sand under water forms rows of dunes that make me hold my breath: you pass in an instant from two and a half meters depth to two meters and even less: our minimum draught is a meter and a half! The risk of running aground is high, but with this calm weather it would not be too difficult to get away with it.

After a while it gets monotonous, until, after passing a solitary lighthouse, we gradually move away and pass into deeper waters.

Approaching IslaTiburón we are delighted to encounter several fin whales. We also curiously spot strange parallel trails of live beings swimming under the surface of the water, but which we cannot see and which I have never seen before or since. They will remain a mystery.

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We also encounter the extraordinary sight of several hundred common dolphins: always a wonder.

I'm going to establish my anchorage in Caleta dos Perros (cove of dogs) in front of an incredible desert and mountainous scenery. In short: a day to be remembered, also for the two beautiful fish that Margherita, a furious fisherwoman, manages to bring on board for dinner!

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From Friday 25 to Sunday, April 27. From Isla Tiburon to Salsipuedes, Sea of Cortez

Surprisingly, an unusual wind from the east (the anchorage is instead protected from the west) makes us roll. I imagine it's the equivalent of the tramontana (north wind), that is, a land wind that blows along the great valley that leads into the continent.



Illustrazione 30: Best Explorer in Tiburon in Bahia Dos Perros (Bay of Two Dogs) – In the background, the coast of the continent

That's right: around 11 p-m. it stops completely and the anchorage becomes calm again.

We take the opportunity to go ashore and explore the desert slopes of the hills. There is no sign of life. However, we pay attention to where we step, you never know if there are rattlesnakes around.

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Illustrazione 31: A Trip ashore in Tiburon

A fishermen's boat arrives on the beach and gives us some information about the fish, the jellyfish and the places.

In the evening the wind rises from the west from which we are protected: it confirms the hypothesis that these are daily breezes. At night we hear barking: could it be a coyote?

To the north of our position in the center of the Sea of Cortez there are numerous islands very poorly depicted on the map. I don't trust to get there directly and I decide to go and look for anchorage on the other side of the sea (which is also called Gulf of California) in San Francisquito Bay.

Besides, that is the first decent anchorage to the north of Santa Rosalia.

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Once sailed, we clear Punta Monumento, the southern end of Isla Tiburon, in a cobalt-colored sea, passing outside of a large steep-walled rock, Isla Turners.

We proceed close hauled against the moderate wind from the west that continues to push us until after lunchtime. In the middle of the channel we meet a pod of common dolphins which, as usual, cheers us up and helps us to bear the unpleasant wave from the west made even more unpleasant by a decent current against the wind that stirs up the sea even more.

Once in the bay I don't feel like trying to enter a pocket that opens on its southern side and that could offer us better shelter. The anchorage is still comfortable, although the rocky surroundings have a rather gloomy look.

Less than twenty miles to the north there is an island that is intriguing because of its name: Salsipuedes, which means "land if you can."

To begin with, the chart shows only one instead of two, and in the wrong position.

I had not yet developed the technique of deriving a georeferenced chart from satellite photos and I am very uncertain about where I actually am. It is a strange and exciting feeling to navigate as our ancestors did without reliable charts or without any reference!

We find a crack where we think we can stop peacefully by bringing four lines to the ground, as if they were moorings. We are immediately covered by swarms of very annoying gnats. The island hosts an incredible number of sea birds and pelicans. I suspect they are the main hosts of the gnats.

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From Sunday 27th to Monday 28th April. From Salsipuedes to Angel de la Guardia, Sea of Cortez

It is not surprising that they gave this island the name "Land if you can": the narrow cove into which we have slipped, as well as being so narrow that it cannot accommodate any other boat, however small, looks like it could become a dangerous trap in an instant, judging by the depth of the beach and the height of the terminal dune, which is a sure index of the height of the waves that come to sweep it. It is a funnel open to an arm of the sea about ten miles wide, sufficient to raise significant waves.



Illustrazione 32: Satellite image of Salsipuedes

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Beyond the beach that forms a short isthmus opens another twin cove, the continuation of the gap between the rocks, which looks even more dangerous than this one: on that side the miles of open sea are more than fifty.



Illustrazione 33: Salsipuedes is covered with volcanic rocks

A little further to the north of the mouth, a shallow underwater rock has been reported, which, however, cannot be seen from the ground even from above and of which we will only have an intuition when passing by it.

The rest of the island is made of steep and uninviting rocks that are inhabited by countless cormorants and pelicans, not to mention the large black and white seagulls with yellow legs called Lesser

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Black-backed Gull, and are frequented by large red crabs and quiet big lizards while on the very clear bottom of the bay slides a rare angel fish (perhaps *Squatina Californica*).

Volcanic activity, frequent in this part of America, must have been recent because the soil is made of lapilli, lava flows that incorporate pieces of alien rock and shattered lava bombs. We climb from one side to the other of the isthmus until we cast our gaze southwards and, favored by the transparency of the air, we can see well the nearby Isla las Animas and San Lorenzo, almost attached and the more distant Tiburon, in addition to the coasts of the peninsula and the continent on the horizon.

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Illustrazione 34: The flock of little grebes

Two Humpback whales are slowly passing between Salsipuedes and Las Animas. The silence is broken only by the cries of birds and, when we return to the boat, by the whirring of a dense flock of small birds, which we in Italian call “tuffetti” (little grebes?) and which occasionally all dive together to reappear a little further away shortly after. If it weren't for the damned gnats, it would be a rude paradise, albeit slightly disturbing.

Tired of enduring their disturbance, the next day we set sail to go further north, stopping along the way in a small bay after Punta las Animas (original here to name the places!) as well infested with gnats.



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In the middle of the Sea of Cortez, a large island rises a little further north: Angel de la Guardia. It is long, high, steep, reddish and barren. I don't think we'll have time to go and visit its northern side, the only one that, apparently, offers some place to anchor safely. Too bad: the wilder the places are, the more they attract me.

For now, we are heading towards the coast and the village of the same name of the island, where a long sandbar will protect us from any gusts from the north, greeted before entering the bay by a fin whale.

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From Monday 28 to Wednesday 30 April. From
Angel de la Guardia to Tiburon, Sea of Cortez

The entrance to the bay of Angel de la Guardia reserved a surprise.

The bay is sheltered by various islands and rocks with sheer walls and bright, varied colors. While my gaze was uncertain where to rest, the cliffs, the rocks or the route, a movement in the sea catches it. It is sunset and the warm light and the low sun magnify the contrasts and the strange splashes stand out clearly on the mirror surface of the sea.

I have never seen anything like this before. They are quite close and after a while becomes clear who makes them: squids, large squids busy with some unusual activity, hunting, sex, who knows? Impossible to fix a satisfactory image. But they were big, were they



Illustrazione 36: Pueblo Bahía de Los Angeles - Ruins

the infamous Humboldt squid, fearsome aggressors and murderers who recently populated these seas?

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We go ashore taking the opportunity to unload the rubbish, which they collect here. We exchange a few words with the owner of the small grocery store and with the bar manager, almost the only buildings, while we sip a margarita. They are not very sociable, but here the North American tourists, who mostly come to camp, seem not to raise much sympathy and Europe is very far away.

We return to the boat just in time to avoid the gale that begins to blow from NNE at thirty knots. We are protected from the waves and the bottom is a good holder, no problem. It calms down towards evening. The next day it rises again, a little more from the west.

Some park rangers come to visit us (maybe the park is on the island, I don't think it's here).

The time to set the return route is approaching. If we leave tonight we can be in Tiburon tomorrow morning and half the crew will not have to endure a long navigation, Nicoletta, Margherita and I are enough to steer the boat.

The night is pitch black and our route will take us past the rocks to the north of Isla Partida, a small island that is part of the ridge starting from Angel de la Guardia and extending through the seabed of the Sea of Cortez as far as Guaymas, surfacing from time to time.

In these conditions I miss the radar a lot, especially because of the uncertainty of the cartography. And indeed: when we are more or less in the vicinity of the islet the echo sounder starts to show signs of life and to indicate the depth decreasing rapidly.

In the pitch dark (there is no moon) you can't see anything and we suspect we are a little too close to the island. I slow down. Nicoletta, who has a sixth sense for danger, deflects the route further to the north. And the seabed finally deepens and finally the echo sounder no longer marks anything.

We'll talk about it when I tell you about our next visit to Isla Partida...

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Anyway, everything's fine. The phosphorescence in the sea is fantastic.

We return to anchor in Bahia de dos Perros where we will rest until evening, before another night of navigation.

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From Wednesday 30 aprile to Friday 2 maggio. From Tiburon to Marina Real, Sea of Cortez

We found that Bahia de dos Perros is very dangerous, but for a very particular reason!

After a morning of rest with the sun beating down fiercely we lie down for a nap. "Nanni, there are bees!". I pull myself up still sleepy and in fact I see that there are a couple of bees buzzing near the hatchway. Strange, during the previous stop we didn't see any.

A few seconds later a few others arrive and enter below deck. I also go in to check and stop in disbelief at the base of the entrance ladder: the kitchen sink is black with bees and so are all the windows of the small lounge. There are also some on the dining table. There must be a thousand of them!

They are not aggressive, they seem almost stoned. Suddenly I realize they must be thirsty and they crowd around the traces of humidity! But obviously we can't keep them inside.

Maybe they'll go away in the evening, but in the meantime they've already stung Lucia, who is having an allergic reaction, but luckily we manage to slow it down with antihistamines.

I try to use a mosquito spray with no effect. I try to smoke them out, with terrible results for the furniture and again without effect. In desperation I close the companionway, at least they don't come in anymore, and resisting the heat like a crematorium oven I switch on the vacuum cleaner and suck them up one by one.

Poor things! But the solution is effective. Luckily, they haven't entered the cabins which are dark.

I finally go out to breathe and the fierce sun seems like an air conditioner! Lucia is stable.

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At six in the evening, when we set sail, no more bees are seen around.

I set a direct course for Marina Real, a marina just north of Tetas de Cabra.

The wind is stable from the stern at around ten knots from NNE, too light to allow us to go sailing, but at least it doesn't slow us down.

During the night we meet several fishing boats. Unfortunately, I experience a hostile attitude and not for the first time. It is not found everywhere, but when it happens it is very unpleasant.



Illustrazione 37: A similar fishing boat in the Sea of Cortez

There are several boats are trawling across our route. I am always very respectful, both for their sake and for my own safety, in addition, of course, to the rules for preventing collisions at sea. So, I slow down and wait for them to change of course in their back and forth and move away to pass them by the stern.

Only then do I move, but as soon as I'm within range a couple of them unexpectedly turn back and come at me, forcing me to a

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sudden course change. As expected, as soon as they are sure to have disturbed me, they resume their previous route. Clearly a maneuver made on purpose.

I'm not raising my voice, but I hope my curses reached them nice and fresh (the image below refers to another fishing boat).

In the morning we stop to rest a little while by anchoring in Bahia de San Pedro, which we visited on the way out, so that we arrive at the marina fairly early in the afternoon to prepare for the disembarkation of some of my guests. There are only few people around, probably the season is a bit late for most tourists.

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From Friday 2 to Thursday 8 May. From Marina Real to Guaymas, Sea of Cortez

The ladies are leaving. Only Margherita remains onboard to help me get back to Guaymas, while she will leave in a week time. We can take it easy.

After spending the rest of the day shopping, we leave the next day to anchor in San Carlos.

There is a light breeze from the west, unusual, but it invites us to enjoy a relaxing sailing day. The sea is calm and the wind is constant: an ideal situation to lock the helm and let the boat, well balanced, proceed on her own while we lie down to sunbathe and enjoy the light lapping of the wake. A rare occasion of a heavenly sailing.

Later the wind drops and we go anchoring and continuing to Guaymas the next day.

Margherita lets off steam by fishing (she is very passionate about it, but the other ladies are not), but with little success. Since she doesn't want to listen to me and keeps the fishing line very long, what we fish first is a motorboat, which as always passes us as close as possible, God bless it, and then a pelican.

This one got caught in the fishing line without the hook penetrating the flesh, but clearly it needs to be freed, Margherita doesn't feel up to it and I have to do it. Too bad we are right next to the tip of Cape Haro and light gusts of wind and current eddies quickly drift me towards the rocks.

I have this large and irascible bird with a large and hooked beak in my hands and I have not instructed Margherita, who is very agitated, to start the engine and operate the control levers.

With a dramatic decision I cut the fishing line right above the bait, hoping it falls off on its own since it hasn't penetrated, and I rush

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just in time to the controls. It would have been the last straw to shipwreck because of a pelican in total calm of wind!

The Guaymas marina welcomes us with one of its companions on the pier who doesn't move when we arrive. The following days are spent completing small jobs and walking around the city. Now almost two months will pass before we will have guests on board again, I will use the time doing a number of odd jobs on board.



Illustrazione 38: The indifferent pelican on the pier

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From Friday, May 9th to Sunday, June 1st.

Guaymas, Sea of Cortez

I'm alone.

I have many things to do that will keep me busy. Here at the marina there are only a few inhabited boats, as well as a couple that anchored in front and whose occupants give clear signs of wanting to be left alone. A large American motor yacht with no people on board is calmly washed daily by a guy who continuously listens to Mexican music kept at high volume and who after a few days drives me to the brink of madness.

Closer to shore a Mexican fisherman goes out every now and then returning with large dolphins (dorados) and almost in front of him lies the port pilots' boat, with whom I usually exchange a few words as I pass by.

At night I see often large rats passing on the pier, but they seem to prefer to get on other boats. The port offices, the docks and the showers are kept very clean, but this does not prevent large cockroaches from scurrying around undisturbed.

The weather is almost always nice and dry, with some intervals of humidity and pleasant temperatures between 25 and 30 degrees Celsius that last until the end of the month, with an occasional rainy day that in a few days turns all the scorched surroundings green again.

The pilots have problems with the engine of their boat and the young man who is working on it can't get anywhere. They borrow an open boat with a large outboard motor to continue their work, but a couple of days later I see it half sunk surrounded by them all looking at it without knowing what to do.

I approach them to give as much comfort as I can and while they vent their frustration they ask me if by chance I have a motor pump, which I actually have and lend to them immediately. I fix it for them

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and I see that they start pumping right away while the boat, as I said, is half completely underwater. I can't believe my eyes.

I gently warn them that they have no hope of succeeding, because they are trying emptying the Sea of Cortez and then throwing the water back in and it seems like a long job to me. I try to insist with little success that first of all they have at least to raise the edges of the boat out of the water, which is copiously entering it, and above sea level, but they don't seem to appreciate my suggestion and then I walk away because I have no idea how delicate their susceptibility is.

When after a while I go back with the situation unchanged, they return the pump to me and in thanking me they inform me that the whole bottom has come off and there is nothing to be done...

Mexico!

On the first of June in the evening a very strong hot wind rises suddenly from the land. At 11 p.m. I go out on deck to check the moorings before going to bed and almost burn my hands grabbing the rope fasteners.

It's forty degrees!

A few days later in Hermosillo the temperature will reach fifty-five!

I resist for a week, then I give in and buy a 110V air conditioner (the voltage here is that of the USA) which I install precariously on the deckhouse: at least it lowers the humidity.

A couple of days before the sudden change in climate, I imprudently, but finally without any trouble, took a solitary trip in the dinghy quite a bit outside the bay and had the incredible adventure of meeting a group of mantas that crossed continually jumping out of the water the entire outer gulf as far as Cape Haro.

Maximum of luck: I had the camera with me and I recorded the video that I attach here!

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[Jumping mantas](#)

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From Monday 2 to Thursday, June 26.

Guaymas, Sea of Cortez

The climate has definitely changed. It's as if they flipped a switch: before it was hot, a pleasant and dry heat, now it is almost unbearable, scorching.

The pages of the official logbook which remain mostly blank, contrary to the usual, testify to this: I am too heartbroken to even write.

Since we started our navigations leaving Italy I have duly entered at least some note every day I am on the boat. I did well, because it is an official document and, the times I have undergone a check, having done so has helped me to put the authorities at ease.

I found net curtains that let light and air (that little) pass through but make the sun's rays a little less fierce and I spread them out as a awning.

I use my time to look for paints, brushes, wood, small parts, in short all those little things that are often needed for working on the boat, but that here, either because American standards in inches are used and we have the metric standard, or because the region is still poor and with little maintenance activity, are difficult to find with the specifications I need.

While I'm out and about I observe the people. Many have an Indian appearance whose most curious characteristic is the mouth with the corners pointing downwards and then the aquiline nose, which gives a frown upside down. The students wear elegant clothes all the same, a kind of uniform, which they wear with pride.

There are long queues in front of the pawn shops, which says a lot about the poverty of the region. The patrol vans that drive around with soldiers armed to the teeth are not as frequent as in Santa Rosalia: this city is known to be the safest in Mexico and in fact, even wandering around the suburbs with the obvious appearance of a foreigner, I have never felt to be in danger.



Illustrazione 39: Faithful at Mass in the Cathedral

In supermarkets there is enough food to our liking, except for the cheese which seems to be made mostly of polypropylene. I often get around by city buses, but a couple of times I rented a car to look for equipment in San Carlos and took the opportunity to take a look also at the desert and spectacular surroundings, full of cactus, but I didn't dare to explore the white roads leading to the cliff: too lonely for the possible consequences of any breakdowns.

I'm not exactly a devout person, but I sometimes visit the cathedral in classic Spanish colonial style, recent: from the nineteenth century, where I observe another colourful sample of the population.

In a corner of the port near the boats I sometimes see an old fisherman successfully using the "sparviero, or rezzaglio or

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giacchio" (seine?), that round net with the lead weights around it that is thrown from the shore with a circular motion in shallow water and traps the fish underneath, an ancient and spectacular fishing technique.

I share a few beers in the evening with a couple of boat neighbors: I have always got on well with the Americans when the relationship becomes personal. The boy who cleans the neighbor's boat keeps flooding me with Mexican music which, together with the sweltering heat, is my personal torture.



Illustrazione 41: Frigates resting in the evening on cacti

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From Thursday, June 26 to Thursday, July 3.

Towards Bahia del Los Angeles, Sea of Cortez

I rent a car to pick up Mariele and Nico at the Hermosillo airport at eleven in the evening. There is no one on the street and unintentionally I slightly exceed the speed limit: a policeman stops me and contests the crime with a stern frown. I had been warned not to trust them. The fine is 800 pesos (just over 40 Euro). I am always very humble and yielding in these circumstances, I immediately take out my credit card. No señor, solo moneta! I take out my wallet and show it: look, I only have five hundred! He grabs them: okay, you can go. No piece of paper is filled out...

When I board the ladies I'm still grinning.

We leave immediately the next day. Strangely the boat is very slow. The engine overheats and stops right away. With only the jib I manage to reach a shelter behind an islet at the entrance to the entrance channel and drop anchor. Meanwhile I discover that the fresh water system has a leak and five hundred liters of water have ended up in the bilge before I realized it.

We dive: luckily here the water is far too hot. The propeller has become almost a cylinder of calcareous tubules. Never seen such encrustation. It is not easy to remove them. Luckily Nicoletta is a trained diver and completes the work very well. The swim is good for us anyway, in the scorching heat.

I repaired the fault to the fresh water system and also cleaned the water filter of the engine, since here it is quiet and it is a nice place we spend the night without moving.

The next morning we set sail for San Carlos where we will refill water and diesel fuel and then go to moor at Marina Real, where Nicoletta had landed a month ago. With the galley filled, we enjoy a beautiful night of sailing to the cove of Isla Salsipuedes where we had already been.

Surprise: no annoying gnats and no sea birds.

I wish I could see underwater to understand what happened to cause this change. On this side of the Sea of Cortez the air is much drier and makes the heat more bearable, maybe even the fish have gone elsewhere in vacation.

The next day we reached Bahia Los Angeles, but this time we went to anchor in a “hurricane hole”, a nearby relatively small bay surrounded by mountains and completely deserted: Puerto Don Juan. Well, the life at sea has not disappeared. A mako shark passed a few meters from the stern and a sperm whale showed itself, then dolphins and flying manta rays: hurray!

To those of us who like lonely and wild places, this, in its rudeness, seems like a paradise.



Illustrazione 42: Puerto Don Juan

From Friday 4 to Thursday, July 3. Towards Bahia del Los Angeles, Sea of Cortez

The next day we got on the dinghy and went to see a small side pocket of shallow turquoise water where a small abandoned boat lies. We splash along the rocks of the coast with the water reaching our ankles and the arid stony hills above us that host only sparse dry bushes.



Illustrazione 43: Puerto Don Juan rocky coast

When we stop to try to catch in vain a glimpse of some sign of life on the ground, we feel a tickle on our toes. Surprised, we realize that it is the small fish that are pecking at the dead parts of the skin on our feet, gently removing them: they are not dangerous, on the

contrary, they are very pleasant. Perfect: we are receiving a complete beauty treatment for free!

We indulge taking those baths that in deeper waters we are reluctant to enjoy due to all the aggressive creatures roaming around, we fear above all the squids. The wind that blows strongly contributes greatly to our well-being, but at sunset it too falls and calms down.



Illustrazione 44: An almost indescribable dreamy sunset

A sunset that paints the clouds that have dappled the sky with a fantastic red is replaced by a dark night with the sky, now clear, which is a carpet of pulsating stars. The Milky Way is reflected even more brightly in the water.

But no, it is not the reflection of the sky, it is phosphorescence, intense, even violent phosphorescence in a long winding strip that the current carries right around the boat and under which you can see the silhouettes of the fish darting around illuminated in their movement. We remain enraptured to observe the incredible spectacle for a long time.

From Friday July 4 to Saturday July 5th. From Puerto Don Juan to Isla Partida and then to Bahia San Francisquito, Sea of Cortez

I am curious to visit Isla Partida, that islet south of the great Angel de la Guardia next to which we passed at night without seeing it.

At this time of the year the winds are quite light and predominantly southerly, so the island, which has a bay open to the north, should offer some good shelter. I bought a recent guide for yachtsmen that gives us a lot more useful information.

The island is not far away and we anchor there shortly after lunchtime. During the journey we spotted three fin whales that accompanied us almost to the anchorage: what a nice arrival! There is time to go ashore. The island is small, practically made up of a short half-moon shaped ridge with a couple of hills at the ends. From satellite photos it would seem to be the rest of a small crater.

We dive in and have for the first time the pleasure of observing tropical fish in an environment that is just short of being covered in corals.

The next day I take the satisfaction of going to check where we passed the previous time: the GPS track is truthful, unlike the paper map, while with the calm sea and during the day, proceeding with caution, we can avoid any dangers.

These are there indeed! The rock is 0.7 miles to the north northwest of the northern end of the island and extends underwater with a water-level shoal a further 0.2 miles off: we did pass right by its extreme edge, by a hair's breadth! We sweat cold belatedly.

We move south along the coast, instead of crossing as last time.

In the channel between the islands of Salsipuedes, Las Animas and San Lorenzo and the coast two migrating sperm whales keep us

company and on arrival two devil rays welcome us, performing evolutions on the surface of the water. Here is one of the sperm whales:

Sperm whale in front of the boat

This time, with the comfort of the new guide, I venture to enter the San Francisquito pocket, also trusting my lifting keel: it is easier than I first feared, not having reliable charts. However, not to risk it, I anchor not too deep inside. There is time for a trip ashore.

Saturday July 5th. Bahia San Francisquito, Sea of Cortez

We lower the dinghy into the sea and go ashore: we could have easily proceeded with the boat quite a while further.



Illustrazione 45: Anchored at the entrance to the inner bay

We land on the beach and it seems immediately to us that we are walking on another world: the desert of Baja California surrounds us as I had only sensed until now. It is a desert full of extraordinary, contorted, dry, thorny, flowering, creeping, erect plants, which rise directly from the sandy and stony, arid soil, sprinkled here and there with shells, witnesses of past marine

incursions, immersed in silence where only the murmur of the wind occasionally arrives.

There is no one: an enchantment! The three of us disperse to explore the environment, unexpectedly losing immediately sight of each other, obliterated by what seemed like a few plants, but which hide people effectively.



Illustrazione 46: The look of the Baja California desert

We are torn between the desire to see beyond, because every step gives us a different perspective, and the fear of forgetting the road and time, fascinated by the magical experience. A tall, slender cactus on this side, another bush loaded with long thorns on that side. Further on, a thin bundle of long black stems: I recognize it, it is

an ocotillo that I had already seen in bloom many years ago in Arizona, bright red flowers that sprout together with rows of very green leaflets attached to the stem a few days after one of the very rare rains. Now it looks completely dead, but it's just saving water!



Illustrazione 47: The storm surges bring the shells this far - or is it the ground that has risen?

To the left there is a low tuft of intricate stems, also without leaves, to the right another thorny bundle, this time of a cactus that contorts as if it wanted to imitate petrified snakes as they explore the surroundings.

And unexpectedly we glimpse some delicate lilac-colored flowers sprouting among the sharp thorns.



Illustrazione 48: Cactus flower

And there is a sign of life: a turkey vulture that rotates slowly up a little to the side of us, looking for some unlikely carrion without a flap of wings.

We get closer to each other, disentangling ourselves from the thorns that seem to want to keep us here, but the boat is stronger than the desert and is calling us.

In a corner of the beach there is a small wooden cabin that hides a real toilet, rather dirty and without water, which someone will have to bring sooner or later to fill the half plastic bin placed next to it for the purpose.

A motorboat is arriving and docking at the pier. We approach and thus meet two North American guys who are camped nearby for fishing: they kindly give us a beautiful grouper just caught, it's too

much for them, that I will struggle to finish, being the only one on the boat to appreciate the fish!



Illustrazione 49: A flying Turkey vulture

The guys do not disturb the quiet of the evening that concludes one of the most beautiful and serene days of our stay in the Sea of Cortez!

From Sunday 6 to Monday, July 14 In Guaymas, Sea of Cortez

It's time to go back: we need to prepare the boat for the winter season. We will leave her in Guaymas at the Marina Seca shipyard until next spring: it is very likely that next year our route will take us to the Galapagos Islands and we already know that in spring we will have to have time to prepare the boat following their perscriptions.

We set sail to arrive tomorrow morning in San Carlos and refill tanks with diesel fuel and water to be ready when we return given the limitations of Guaymas, accompanied by a group of bottlenose dolphins who enjoy doing evolutions under the bow.

Around us we see life: flying manta rays and marlin jumping out of the water. After the stop in San Carlos we stop again for a last swim north of Punta Colorado, a fairly protected anchorage that we already used.

We returned to moor at the usual marina, refreshed in the evening by a welcome storm: the heat is suffocating.

Two days later we are ready. Marina Seca is behind an islet that closes off a kind of internal lagoon full of shallows in which we venture with great caution.

The travel lift is ready for us, but it has a capacity of twenty-five tons (nominally). I am sure that that it is the weight of Best Explorer (I will be corrected many years later when a more accurate measurement will indicate that as the weight of the empty hull: with full tanks and equipment it is closer to twenty-nine).

Then maybe those indicated are the American "short tons" which correspond to just over twenty-two of ours! The fact is that the straps creak dangerously and the tires flatten quite a bit, we are a hair's breadth from disaster.

We have to abort the operation! It's a problem: I'll have to delegate someone to bring the boat again here (there's another

shipyard next door with a much bigger travel lift) and trust that everything goes right. And there are only a few hours to do it.

I give keys and instructions to an elderly man I have already met and who is recommended to me. I also commend Best Explorer to Providence and cross my fingers and toes.

Mariele and Nico leave on Friday while I finish tidying up the last things and I leave too on Monday morning, with anxiety on my shoulders.



Illustrazione 50: Best Explorer as I will find her next year