

Baja California

~18 pesos per dollar

6400 miles

Tuesday Feb. 14, 2017

Vancouver WA

On the road at 11 after jump starting the dead battery! No idea why it was dead, overcast, mid-40s. Arrive at Debbie Fisher & Paul Lamb's home on the river in Vancouver WA at 3pm after taking a detour on side roads to see the countryside north of Vancouver, which turned out to be more developed than we expected.

Went for a lovely walk along the river, played guitar for a bit, had an amazing meal of salmon with tomato/olive/caper relish, roast potatoes and sweet potatoes, and a mango/walnut/greens salad. Crashed about 9:30, rain on the roof. Up at 5:30. 205 south around Portland (already heavy commute traffic). Raining heavily.

Wed Feb 15

Redding CA

Rain lightened up about halfway down Oregon. Very windy in Medford. This is a driving day. Rest area picnics. Dry & sunny over the Siskiyou. Arrive in Redding about 2:30. We've had enough driving for one day. Walk the Sundial Bridge trail. The river is in flood, swirling muddy through the trees along the shore. The trails dead end at flooded spots, but we were still

able to walk for 45 minutes. Overcast but dry & 56° - very pleasant. Had nice car naps. Leftover spaghetti for dinner in the parking. A car has parked near us playing incredibly loud rap music. Even with earplugs it's unbearable. Happy to be done with dishes so we can drive away. Raining again. Northern California has been deluged with rain this winter.

Sleep in rest area 23 miles south of Redding. Much warmer than last night! Hard rain in the night.

Thursday Feb. 16 Sausalito CA

On the road 7:15. Overcast, windy, dry. Nut trees in bloom. Blue sky now! 20 west at Williams through rolling hills coated in a skim of green and dotted with oak trees, running creeks, & cattle.

Nice walk on the Redbud trail in Cache Creek, through oak-pine hills. Blackened trunks of burned oaks striking against green hills. Tricky to cross a swollen creek - got just a bit wet and muddy ☺ wildflowers blooming: shooting star, paintbrush. Sunny & fairly warm. 53 south.

Groceries & lunch in Clearlake. The lake level is very high.

Nap in Napa. Park closed due to flooding. meet Sarah Present for dinner in Sausalito, near where she lives. Delicious minestrone at Taste of Rome. Had to leave when a loud jazz band started up. Walked along the marina for a view of the sparkly Bay Bridge. Free overnight parking in the city lot by the marina.

Friday Feb. 17

Monterey CA

Heavy rain in the night. Hang out in coffee shop til rush hour abates. Drive into the city about 9:30. Stressful driving. Walk the Filbert Street steps up Telegraph Hill - no parrots. Drive down Lombard St. switchbacks. Drive down Haight Street and through Golden Gate Park. Gas up and head west to the coast. Too rainy for sightseeing. Lunch picnic (in the van) in Half Moon Bay. Big surf & wind. Big slowdown on 1, detour on San Miguel Canyon Road. All the canyon roads are closed due to mudslides & downed trees. After hitting two dead ends we went back to the 1. It's raining like a monsoon. A big truck got frustrated & tried to turn around across the median and got stuck in the deep red clay mud. Finally arrived in Monterey at 4 and the aquarium closes at 5, so no aquarium today. I'm disappointed, as I've been wanting to come

here for a long time, but I'm grateful we made it here without mishap. Maybe we'll go to the aquarium tomorrow, although it doesn't open until 10.

Dinner at Paprika Cafe. Delicious ~~Lebanese~~ Lebanese, run by a hardworking couple our age. I especially loved the dolmas & hummus. The rain has finally let up.

Montrey, Bless their heart, has free overnight RV parking (8pm to 9am) in the Breakwater lots by the Coast Guard station. Howling wind all night.

Saturday Feb. 18

Burbank CA

The public marina/coast guard station next to the parking lot has bathrooms with pay showers. A bit too cold for showers today though. There is also a really nice paved trail that runs past. Still quite windy - waves crashing over the breakwater - plus we're worried about road closures, so decided we'd better skip the aquarium & head for Burbank. This storm is being called the biggest in CA since 1995.

Beautiful drive through electric green hills. 101 south, 46 E, 1-5. Arrive at brother David's at 3pm after a quick grocery stop. They're not back yet but the neighbor let us in. So nice to have a shower and a home cooked meal!

Sunday Feb. 19

Barbark CA

Grant & I walked in the morning, then David & Ava & I went for a walk after lunch. Grocery shopping, nice salmon dinner. Annie is sick with a cold. Rain off & on. So nice to spend time with almost-three-year-old Ava.

Monday Feb. 20

San Isidro CA

On the road at 8 after showers & saying goodbye to David. Overcast & misty. Traffic light due to holiday. Sky getting lighter as we head south. Arrive Balboa Park about 10:30, Sunshine! Walk around the beautiful old buildings from the 1915 exhibition. After lunch drove to Coronado Island. Found free parking near the Hotel Del and walked the oceanfront promenade. Warm, sunny day with a cool ocean breeze. Heard someone say Seattle is having the second rainiest

6

February in history. Hung out at a coffee shop for a bit then drove to San Ysidro. Gas up & cook dinner at a small park with picnic tables (refries, eggs, & cheese - we call it "eggs & beans"). Spending the night at the Border Station parking lot: \$8.

Tues. Feb. 21

Puerto San Ysidro, Baja

Up at 6 to a pink sky. No indication of how to park at the immigration office to get a tourist visa, but we knew which building it was & had heard you had to pull in as best you can. The Mexican border authorities are very low key. At 7 am the place was empty and we quickly got our forms filled out, paid our 500 pesos (\$25) at the adjacent bank window, & were on our way. You need a visa if you stay more than a week, or go south of Ensenada.

We opted for the toll road to Ensenada, which has better views of the ocean, plus rest areas and no stop signs or speed bumps. Much of the coast is unchecked development: vacation homes & high rise condos, billboards, power lines, chainlink fences. The surf is lovely though. Morning mist.

Arrived in Ensenada about 9. Poor signage to the waterfront area. We felt our way there, asked directions, and found we were there. Free parking spot and cut through a closed restaurant to get to the waterfront promenade. It's a nice stretch of walkway right on the water. It's not terribly long, maybe a quarter mile, and there's a cruise ship terminal at one end. You can hear the ship's PA system onshore... We tried walking back into a neighborhood, but it was uninviting & uninteresting.

It's a warm, sunny day with a lovely ocean breeze. We're sitting on a bench reading, waiting until it's time for a fish taco lunch.

The fish taco stands in the Mercado de Mariscos are nice open stalls with tables. On each table are containers filled with salsas, crema, & chips. The tacos themselves were large chunks of fresh fish battered & fried but not greasy. Served on a corn tortilla, they were 15 pesos each, or about 75 cents. We each ate two. In front of each restaurant is a woman vying for your business. We picked the one with the friendliest smile and told her so. She said she is from Nayarit but left her four kids with her sister so she could earn money to support them. I discouraged her from going to the U.S. to work because the

cost of living is so high and because of Trump's draconian crackdowns. We talked about how horrible he is.

Bought groceries at a big supermarket in Ensenada.

From Ensenada we drove about 3 hours to Coyote Cal's hostel <sup>near Puerto San</sup> Isidro. It's ~~24~~ 24 km from highway 1, the last 4 on a dirt road in terrible condition from the storm. We had hoped to meet other travelers here but we are the only guests. The owners are a Thai woman & her gringo husband. <sup>Taxi</sup> <sup>pick</sup> She does massage (very pricey) and has a beautiful massage room & temple. She does not seem happy here. It's very isolated. It's \$10 per person to camp. It's up on a hill with a beautiful view of the ocean but no beach or beach access. It's warm & sunny but quite windy.

The Santo Tomás valley was lovely: lush, green vineyards, greenhouses, green hills. Lots of construction with bumpy, narrow dirt lanes. Maneadero had terrible potholes. Windy mountain road in places. We were exhausted when we arrived at 3:00, and we only drove 130 miles today!

The smoked tuna in the Ensenada

fish market looked delicious, but turned out to be fairly dry & flavorless. Beautiful Heerman's Gulls with neon orange bills & soft grey bellies.

Beans & eggs for dinner again - yum.

Sea lions barking in the dark. Lots of stars & quiet, just the wind & waves.

Wednesday Feb. 22

Cataviña

A bit less windy. Walked down a rough trail to the wild, rocky shoreline. Pelicans, cormorants, & gulls gathered on offshore rocks. It became very windy. Many half-built houses & parcels surrounded by barbed wire. A surprising number of gringos driving along the remote dirt roads.

Woke to the sounds of mourning doves & chickens.

Leave Coyote Cals at 9:30, back to highway 1 at 10. This side road is a lovely peaceful drive on a good road through green hills & farms. (Except the last bit before Cals.)

Saw many fields of cultivated prickly pear cactus. They take a single pad & plant it, so it looks like rows of Mickey Mouse ears. The road was good, with little traffic between towns. Ranches, vineyards, & crops. Very windy. Stopped in El Rosario for gas (after a picnic lunch of bread, Oaxacan cheese, cucumber, & carrot

at a Pemex in San Quintín). Then the road heads west across the desert. The road is narrow with many potholes, but the desert is gorgeous. Like the Sonoran and Mojave deserts combined, with rocky cactus gardens. Only here they have cardón instead of saguaro, & boojum, or cirio, trees, which look like upside down fizzy green carrots 30 feet tall! They are delightful.

Arrived at Rancho Santa Inez in Cataviña at 3 pm. \$6 to camp in a flat area in the shade of a tree. Clean, simple bathrooms with flush toilets. Surrounded by boulder cactus gardens. Windy but not too. The sweet elderly proprietress said the recent rains & wind here were intense & miserable. So glad we arrived after the storm.

Three big RVs pulled in and three American couples got out & yakked & guffawed loudly, shattering the peace & quiet. Walked over to the little campground cantina for tacos. They turned out to be made with tortillas fried in lard & were very greasy, but tasty. A bit pricey

compared to yesterday's tacos at \$5 each (for a plate of three tacos and beans).

A local character, Ralph, who lives down the road, regaled us with stories of his life here since the mid-80s. He says this has been the worst winter weather he's ever seen down here. \*

Pink clouds fading to an orange sky, light breeze birds twittering in the trees. It's very dark here & the sky crammed with stars. Very quiet.

Thursday Feb. 23

Bahia Los Angeles

43° at 7 am! Blue sky, sun, no wind. Idyllic walk on a track through the desert of boulder gardens & delightful cirio trees. You can't look at these whimsical plants without smiling.

Note: There are several military checkpoints along the highway but they are completely non-threatening.

\* He stops by the campground every ~~the~~ evening to let folks know he'll come by again at 8 am if they need a jump or other help. He has a ham radio & can call for parts. He has a shop as well. I was surprised that even after living here all these years he doesn't speak Spanish.

\* pink sand verberna  
 yellow brittlebush  
 orange mallow  
 blue nightshade

On the road at 8:45

The short stretch of road from the campground to the highway is bumpy with deteriorating asphalt. Highway 1 south of Catawiña is awful, with many deep potholes.

\* many wildflowers blooming: yellow, orange, mauve, and huge swaths of purple carpeting the desert floor. Ocotillo blooming. Still a lot of standing water from the storm. Lite traffic.

Mostly gringos on the road and a few trucks.

Took the side road to Bahía de los Angeles on the Gulf of ~~Cal~~ California. Arrived at Daggett's campground before 11:30. 178 miles took just under three hours, or an average of 60 mph. The speed limit is actually 80 kph, or about 50, and in many places you have to do less because of potholes, washouts, curves, & grades. Bahía de los Angeles

The 42-mile road to ~~Catawiña~~ is excellent & smooth with paved pullouts, & very few cars.

I also love the torotes, or elephant trees, with their chubby white trunks.

It's very windy here. 65° at 1:30 pm. Whitecaps on the bay. We're told it's not usually so windy here and it will die down tomorrow. There are about 10 other rigs here. It's a pretty setting with a sandy beach, and a shade palapa for each site. Hot showers & wifi included. \$8 per person. The large blue bay is ringed by rocky islands. The beach itself

reminds me of Puget Sound with its rocky tidepools. Brown pelicans, gulls, shorebirds, an egret.

Showers, wifi, beach walk, read, potatoes & eggs for dinner. More campers arrived but everyone is very quiet. The wind has died down & you can hear the surf lapping softly. There are many gringo houses clustered along the shore. This bay is popular for kayaking and fishing. Saw a roadrunner & got a good look.

Friday Feb. 24

Ojo de Liebre

It gets light at 6 am - so nice, 46° at 7. An absolutely perfect day, just a light breeze. It's paradise here. We sat by the edge of the shore, drank our coffee, and drank in the serenity & view. It felt very primal, like the first air-breathing fish might climb onto the sand any moment. ~~the~~ This area has coastal mountains that create a rain shadow, and it's very dry. No cirio or cardón. Nice long walk on the gently sloping beach. No barnacles like Puget Sound - water here must be too warm. The beach is delightfully litter free. After trying unsuccessfully to upload a photo to FB via the very slow wifi we were on the road at 10. Bought cheese & ice at the well-stocked and reasonably priced store in town. Bahía is a nice little town

and I can understand the appeal of spending time here. Lots of kayakers out today.

The road from the Bahía junction to Guerrero Negro was pretty good - much better than the road north of the junction. Stopped by the road in Villa Jesús to eat lunch. Very litter-strewn. A man rode by on a horse.

Actually 3 because new time zone.

Arrived in Guerrero Negro about 2pm. Bought motion-sickness pills at the pharmacy and some groceries. Five miles south of town is the turnoff to Ojo de Liebre lagoon, where the grey whales breed. It's 25 miles of good dirt road (parts still muddy & rutted from the rain).

Oh, before we got to Guerrero Negro we passed an agricultural checkpoint. We paid 20 pesos & got a receipt, but they didn't check anything. A young woman was asking in English if anyone had jumper cables. We did, so she climbed in the back and we drove her out to her car. It turned out to be in a muddy field and I was worried about getting stuck. She is down here working for a whale tour company. She had parked in the field to go for

a run and came back to find a dead battery. It seemed a bit foolish to drive into a muddy field, leave the car unattended, and go running off into the hot, dry desert alone. We were glad to be able to help her. Her name is Maddy and she is from Denver.

Back to the lagoon. You have to drive across the commercial salt flats to get there, and they take your name & license plate number. You pay a \$5 entrance fee at the lagoon itself, and \$10 if you want a palapa (camp shelter with table). We arrived at 3 and I had such a splitting headache that I felt nauseous. Took tylerol and finally fell asleep for a while. Woke feeling marginally better. It's very windy & cold here. I couldn't eat so Grant opted to just have a p.b. sandwich. Lots of flies, but they disappeared at dark. Saw one whale breath.

Looks like you can camp here for free if you don't want a palapa.

Saturday Feb. 25 San Ignacio

A long night. Headache finally gone but now I have diarrhea. It's a long trek to the outhouse. We may have to defer

whale watching. It's a lovely morning with no wind. Lots of dew on the van.

I started feeling well enough to chance a whale trip and Maddy was our guide! Perfect timing. \$45 each for about two hours with the whales. It was amazing! They were all around us, blowing, spyhopping, and swimming. After a while one of the whales came up to the boat and let us pet him for about 45 minutes! He was an adolescent male - the adult males don't come to Baja. His skin felt like rubber, or one person said eggplant. We also saw a dolphin and osprey on a nest. Then we went for a walk on the shore, but I was feeling pretty wiped still.

He sprayed me!

(Grant says the best of the trip)

Wifi, gas, and tacos (for Grant) in Guerrero Negro and on the road at 1:40. Soon we were back in cactus country, which was nice after the barren scrub. The road was quite good and we arrived in San Ignacio about 3:30.

Los Petates campground was on a beautiful lagoon with date palms for shade. We napped for a while but there were too many bugs so we went looking for another option. Loud frogs!  
We drove into San Ignacio, which has a central plaza with a restored mission

church. They were having a fund-raising drive for healthcare.

Then we backtracked to a campground called Rice & Beans. \$12 per site with no hookups. It's near the highway, but has wifi and showers.

Most places here speak English and accept dollars.

Potatoes and eggs for dinner (I'm not very hungry yet).

Sunday Feb. 26

Playa la Perla, Mulege

Overcast & 56°. A peaceful night. I'm feeling quite a bit better. Took nice hot showers. No bugs here. Drove to town, parked in the plaza and went for a nice walk. The town has a pleasant vibe. Many date palm trees make it feel like an oasis. Grant bought chicharones from a vendor who was making them fresh.

Left San Ignacio about 10:30. Drove through cardón desert with chunky black lava beds & blooming lupine. Arrived in Santa Rosalía about 11:30. It's the first Gulf-side town on highway 1, so it's a welcome sight to see the expanse of sparkling blue water. It appears that the towns are responsible for ~~maintaining~~ maintaining their stretch of the highway (not the state)

and the town sections are in bad shape. ~~or maybe it's just that they get more wear and tear from the local traffic.~~ It certainly serves to slow people down. The stretch of road just north of Santa Rosalía is incredibly litter strewn and industrial. The town itself seemed pleasant, with wood-framed houses and a malecón, or waterfront promenade. We wanted to park in the shade, as the day had gotten pretty toasty, but there wasn't much to be had. We found a spot with a view of the water through a metal gate and had our picnic. We'll walk the malecón on the return trip, when I'm hopefully feeling better.

Mulegé is a quaint small town about an hour south of Santa Rosalía. We bought a few supplies at a small store but decided to defer a walk for the return trip. About 12 miles south starts Bahía Concepción, a beautiful inlet with many campgrounds and sandy beaches. Thank goodness for our excellent camping book, which told us how to find Playa la Perla, an idyllic spot on a protected cove with shelters (for sun and wind) and only two other campers. No big rigs here, ~~wakes~~ unlike most of

the sites we passed which were wall-to-wall RVs. It's quite warm here but in the shade with the breeze it's perfect.

Clusters of magnificent frigatebirds soaring overhead. We arrived about 3pm, on a rough access road we would have never found without our guidebook. A pretty stiff breeze blowing from the south. 79° in the shade.

The outhouse is clean but primitive and the ageing plywood platform looks like it might cave in if someone sat on it.

The old woman who owns the property came by to collect 100 pesos (#5). She is very sweet but disheveled-looking. At first I thought she might be crazy. People who don't speak Spanish might not understand why she's asking them for money (or what she's asking).

Spaghetti for dinner. The wind died down and the sky turned pink. Another couple pulled in just before dark. Everyone is quiet and keeps to themselves.

The couple next door, old hippies from British Columbia, invited me over to sit by their fire & play guitar. She's a guitar player as well. It was fun but the wind really kicked up, so we had to cut it short. In the morning I heard her in their trailer playing autoharp and singing her heart out to old folk songs.

Monday Feb. 27

Loreto

Lovely morning, cool with a light breeze and slight overcast, which soon burned off. Went for a nice walk north to Playa el Requesón. Saw egrets, a roadrunner, mangroves, and a lot of garbage. I understand that garbage is a big problem in much of the world - modern detritus tends not to be biodegradable, and many places have no landfills. Old cars and boats stay where they die. They're handy for parts, and where else could they go? Plastic containers, broken glass, rusty drums. You really have to look past it and try to ignore it. Even if you picked it up where would it go? If Baja were cleaner and had fewer potholes it would have more tourists, so I guess it's a price worth paying.

Left at 10 and drove out via El Requesón, a much better road. A beautiful drive along the gorgeous bay. We love the scenic combination of cactus and water. Soon we saw the Gulf again. Arrived in Loreto at 11:30 and found our way to the Rivera del Mar RV Park. \$10 for a tent camping spot. It's a nice oasis here with shade trees, hot showers, laundry, wifi, and a

covered area with tables & chairs. It's in a neighborhood with barking dogs, chickens, and road noise, but we're OK with that.

Hung out til about four, reading, journaling, playing guitar, looking at maps. Pleasantly cool in the shade. Walked a few blocks to the water and then along the waterfront promenade, or malecón. It's pretty here but not as pretty as the bays we've seen to the north. There's an airport here and many gringos. We see land for sale for \$95k and houses for \$450k - that's U.S. dollars.

After spaghetti dinner we walked a half mile or so to town. It's a Monday night, so pretty quiet, but there were a few people strolling in the small square. There's a nice street of arched topiary trees for pedestrians and a church we couldn't see well at night. This campground is conveniently located for walking to town.

Lots of bougainvillea, oleander, coconut palms. It feels semi-tropical. Chased a big gray spider with bright eyes out of the car. Listened to the RV crowd telling stories of all the places they've been. Sometimes it almost feels like one upmanship to see who's been to the most places and had the most exotic and daring adventures.

8pm and the neighborhood noise level has dropped a bit.

Tues. Feb. 28

Loreto

Walked to town this morning before it got hot. Saw people sweeping the streets in front of their businesses with brooms, and cute little kids in their school uniforms. A little guy in his navy slacks & sweater, his hair carefully slicked down. Adorable!

Guys hanging out in the square chatting, people heading to work, opening shops. Looked into the old church with its wooden altarpiece. Walked to the grocery store and saw a traffic cop teaching a young girl. She had a whistle like his, and wore an orange vest. They stood in the middle of the intersection. He held her arms and flapped them up and down in time with the whistle, directing traffic first one way and then the other. She was about nine and looked a little overwhelmed. A group of students and an adult - her classmates? - watched from one corner. I wanted to take a picture but wasn't sure it was appropriate.

We drove up to San Javier mission, in the mountains nearby. It's 35 km on a paved, windy road in good condition. There are views of the sea below. You cross several

streams with standing water and ponds to either side. Ducks, herons, egrets, phoebes. The desert is lush with new green leaves and flowering shrubs. St. Javier is at about 1300' elevation. The church was built in the mid-1700s and has been maintained in its original condition. The stonework is beautiful. The history of how the local indians were treated isn't. The priests brought seeds and planted dates, guavas, figs, and grapes. The town is charming, with roads cobbled with rounded stones. A few low-key businesses sell local produce and herbal products. We bought guava-filled cookies that turned out to be made with flaky pie dough sprinkled with sugar. They were pretty tasty. The carved woodwork in the church is beautiful - beams, and doors with forged iron handles. The altarpiece is gilt. A beautiful building in a stunning and serene setting that belies its painful past. The people here do agriculture and ranching.

Back in town we got gas and tipped the station attendant 20 pesos after she washed all of our very dirty windows. She reminded me of Emma with her butch haircut (buzzcut under a ponytail top) and sweet smile.

Groceries and back to camp, where the wind was picking up and clouds had begun to gather. Nice hot showers in the

deluxe tiled bathroom. Sat in a sheltered common area near the office to do wifi and got to know the 7-year-old son of the owner a bit. He's bilingual and high energy - a handful for his mom. Turns out he has aspergers. He asked me to help him count his piggy bank and was thrilled to discover he had 45 pesos.

Wednesday ~~Feb. 28~~ March 1 Vic + Jane's

In Mexico there are not yet any rules against noise, so trucks drive around blaring advertisements. Some are like ice cream trucks, playing a jingle and selling bread or tortillas. One of them drove around the block several times, playing "It's the breadman, selling bread!"

60° at 7:30 am, lite overcast, lite wind. Organ pipe cactus and cardón cover the hills like stick figure soldiers marching up the slopes. The Sierra Gigante mountains south of Loreto are beautiful and there are rocky islands dotted through the blue Gulf waters. No wonder the Mexican government is trying to develop this area as the next Cabo.

We soon left the coast and drove inland across dry, featureless scrub to Ciudad Constitución. We stopped to buy a food contribution for Jane & Vic, the couple we will be staying with tonight. They are friends of Mark McKinley who spend half the year in Baja. We weren't sure what to bring and couldn't reach them so we called Mark, who said to bring fresh produce & beer. We got watermelon, mangoes, <sup>pineapple</sup>, and a cabbage, plus a six-pack, and headed south toward La Paz. Lots of agriculture here - fields of crops. Saw a crew picking up roadside litter, a welcome site. Lots of caracara perching on cardón.  
(locals call them catele)

At about 2:00 we arrived at the turnoff to Vic & Jane's at milepost 38 (38 kms north of La Paz). We called to let them know, so they could meet us to show us the way. ~~the~~ (Cell service is generally very good along the highway, and T-Mobile plans include calls in Mexico.) We then drove 18 kms to the little town of Reforma, where Vic was waiting with his dirt bike. He led the way down about 7 miles of bumpy, sandy road with thorny plants on both sides (after part of our mirror broke off we folded them both in). They have about 600 acres including half a mile of Pacific Ocean beachfront. Their round,

cement-block house has a thatch roof and a simple interior with minimal furniture. They have a well, solar panels, a propane stove, a fridge + freezer. Two dogs, motorcycles, atvs, various vehicles, containers for storage and a shop, and down by the beach a trailer. Their house isn't close to the beach, but they spend time in the trailer to get a beach fix. Friends of theirs spend a couple months a year in another trailer nearby: Barney + Marilyn. We stopped to meet them and invited ourselves for a potluck. Then we went back to the house to cook. Grant and Jane made a cabbage salad with mango and candied pecans while I played guitar.

Turns out that Vic worked at MicroEncoder and that's how he and Mark met, so we know a lot of the same people.

Back at Barney and Marilyn's we watched the sun set over the ocean, had a tour of Marilyn's "found object" garden with rock paths, bones, driftwood bird baths, float mobiles. I asked if it gets lonely being here for a long time and she said no, but sometimes it gets boring. Their son (actually Barney's son) Jake is visiting from Florida. He's a diver and was wearing a necklace made from a

fossilized shark tooth he found. It was pearl gray and still had serrations along the edges. After an amazing dinner of lentil soup, cabbage salad, shrimp & crab marinara, and watermelon, Jane requested a sing-a-long and I happily played about ten songs while Barney sang along. It was a blast and a dream come true for me. One year ago I was on the other side of the Gulf while other people played guitar around the fire, and set a goal to be able to play guitar myself. And yes, we had a fire tonight too. The stars were amazing. The moon was a crescent. Down here it's at a different angle than up north - lying on its back like an upturned bowl, instead of tipped on its side. The incredibly bright star we've been seeing is Venus. Barney said sometimes it's so bright it reflects on the ocean.

It was very windy this afternoon but died down in the evening, which made it delightful to be outside.

About 8:30 we said goodbye and headed back to Vic and Jane's. Vic built a clever remote control gate with ~~PVC and propane~~ and ~~a video game control remote~~. They've fenced part of their property for security and to keep the local cows out.

a cylinder made from PVC pipe and o-rings and filled with propane and controlled by an RC car remote

Thursday March 2 La Paz

Woke at 5 am but couldn't spot the southern cross. A quiet night with a nice breeze blowing in the windows. Breakfast with Vic & Jane then a long walk through the desert. It's hot and dry here, and dusty and thorny. I can't quite understand why they would choose to live here.

When we got back to the house their neighbor ~~to~~ Juan was walking over. An older man, probably in his 70s, with a round, sun-tined face, grey hair under a baseball cap, and a mauve plaid workshort. His car was stuck in the sand. He came in for a visit and we sat around the table talking in a mix of Spanish & English. Jane handed him her classical guitar and he played a song he wrote for his wife, comparing her to a pitaya cactus flower. Then I played Guantanamera. Then Jane played a few songs on her accordion, and Juan played a couple more songs. He had a sweet, high, old man's voice and a gentle pick & strum style. He and Vic left to free Juan's car. When ~~Vic~~ returned we had lunch and chatted some

saw lots of badger holes.

more before hitting the road about 1:00. Vic showed us the way out. He is especially easy to talk to. She's very nice but a little hard to read.

I think she might be a little aspergers. It was a great experience to visit them but I'm not sure what we would have done if we'd stayed longer. On the way out we passed Barney & Jake who had gone shrimping but didn't get anything.

\* 11 kms north of La Paz

We're staying at Maranatha RV Park on hiway 1 at km 11.\* It only took about an hour to get here. It's \$15 for dry camping, has a pool, wifi, and hot showers and clean bathrooms. We'll probably wait til tomorrow to go into La Paz. Meanwhile Grant is napping and I'm sitting at the adjacent American-style Cafe Exquisita eating a carrot cake muffin.

Juan looked like an old rancher but infact he worked for 30 or 35 years as an x-ray technician and before that he was an army medic. His wife has been a nurse for 57 years. She keeps promising to retire...

Beans, eggs, potatoes, and fried ~~the~~ plantain for dinner - delicious. Between guitar, journal, reading, cooking, & dishes, ~~dinner~~ the evening flew by.

Friday March 3

La Ventana

Cloudy but warm. Hot showers in the clean well-appointed bathroom with toilet paper + hand soap. The campground also has drinking water. A few mosquitoes floating around.

Drove into La Paz and easily found a parking place on the waterfront. It's a city of a quarter million people but doesn't feel that big. It has a nice waterfront malecón, or promenade. Carnaval is just finishing up and there are tacky vendor booths and rides lining the waterfront. Clusters of frigatebirds soaring.

We walked to the plaza where a group of women was doing embroidery together. Got me thinking about the purpose of embroidery in this era of machines that can do the same thing.

The small mercado municipal had lots of fish, meat, cheese, and produce. We bought some feta-like salty goat cheese. La Paz seems like it might be a nice place to live if you wanted to live down here, as there are people to interact with and things to do. We walked the downtown streets but didn't see much we wanted to explore. About 11 we headed to Tecolote beach, about 45 minutes north of town. There are a few restaurants and a few dozen campers

on the beach. The water is that ethereal glacial flour ~~blue~~<sup>green</sup> like milky jade. mangroves grow in shallow areas. It was fairly windy, and too early to stop for the night, so we continued southeast to La Ventana, a beach popular with kite surfers. There's an actual campground in the town but it was packed, so we continued down a sandy road to another beach area that appears to be free. It's very windy (that's why it's popular with kite surfers) but quite pleasant in the lee of the van. It's fun watching the kites fly across the water and up into the air. There are about 50 of them out there, their colorful kites filling the air. We got here about 2 pm.

Spent the afternoon sitting on the beach reading, watching kitesurfers, and taking pictures of frigatebirds. Clusters of them drifted past all afternoon in a steady stream heading north, floating silently like formations of bombers, barely rippling their long, thin wings, their thin, forked tails like kites.

Potatoes, eggs, & beans for dinner. No stars tonight - it's cloudy. The wind has died and it's a lovely temperature. The other camps are dark & quiet. This is not a party scene. The camps look like they are long term, with portable tarp-enclosed toilets,

elaborate shade tarps, and wheels covered to prevent UV damage. A truck came roaring through with a bank of bright lights arrayed across the front for night driving. Blinding.

Today we watched a girl learning how to kite surf. It looked exhausting. You strap this huge kite to your harness, wade into the water, and try to climb onto your board while the kite is pulling on you. She was out there for a long time and never did get up. Twice she got separated from her board and had to try to swim to it while the kite pulled her downwind. Lightning playing to the north.

Saturday March 4 Todos Santos

Woke to lightning, thunder, and raindrops. The sun rose in a blazing orange ball that tucked itself back under a thick blanket of clouds. 69° with a gentle breeze.

North back to highway 1, past the elephant trees and up onto a rise with a view to the sea. Then west on Cardón, a shortcut our offline Mexico maps found (Grant downloads these to his phone - very handy).

This shortcut got us onto highway 1 south, avoiding La Paz. A few miles south of La Paz we took highway 19 west to Todos Santos, arriving around 10 am. It's only about an hour and a half from La Paz. We went first to El Litro campground to make sure we had a place to stay for the night. It's tucked away on a dirt side street near town, and is mostly permanent trailer residents. Dry camping is 100 pesos, or \$5.

Drove back to town, parked in the shade, and went for a walk, but it was hot and we're not used to it. 83° in the shade at 1 pm. The main streets are pretty twisty, with fine art and handicrafts, some local, some brought in from other parts of Mexico. Prices are high and vendors call out to you. We opted to walk on the residential side streets. Back to the campground for lunch and sit in the shade with the breeze making it quite pleasant. The campground is nothing special but does have toilets, showers, and palm trees. The owner, Sylvie, is from Washington. She's been here 15 years and says she never plans to go back to the states. We commiserated about the sorry state of U.S. politics.

About 3 we drove out to Punta Los Lobos to see the fishing boats with their catch. The boats had already come in. We saw a lot of red snapper. It's a picturesque spot

with a towering headland, a freshwater lagoon, and colorful wooden boats.

Then we found our way to Las Playitas north of town where there is a turtle nesting area. They protect the eggs under a greenhouse structure and release any babies that hatch. They release them most nights in the winter. Their website says around 5 pm, but we waited until 5:30 and there was no sign of anyone.

Back in town we had pork carnitas tacos for \$1.25 each, then bought corn cups from a vendor. It's Saturday night and I'm sure the town will be hopping, but we're tired and headed back to camp about seven.

Forgot to mention that we spent an hour or so at a coffee shop with wifi and I had a yummy mango smoothie.

Sunday March 5      Todos Santos

After hot shower we drove out to La Poza, a lagoon with birds. Lots of cinnamon teal. Back in town we walked around a few places we hadn't seen yesterday, including the cultural center, which has a nice recreation of a ranch house of 100 years ago, with a thatch hut for cooking and one for sleeping. Tecolote bookstore has a nice selection of English books, many

about Baja. Lunch in the shady city park then back to camp for siesta.

Another hot day but a stiff wind is kicking up. We also stopped at a store at the south end of town that was a small Mexican store with many gringo items such as hummus. Bought stuff for a taco dinner.

Around 2 we drove out to Punta Lobos and arrived just in time to watch one of the boat captains drive his boat right up onto the beach. They aim for shore, catch the tail of a wave, gun the motor and fly up onto the sand. They've pulled the motor pin so the propellor doesn't churn up sand.

As each boat arrives it sells fish to locals and loads the rest into bins in the back of pickup trucks. Sylvie told me there are two fishing cooperatives. They wait until all the boats are in each day, so they can send for help if someone doesn't make it.

Back in town we checked in with the adventure company to confirm that there will be a turtle release tonight. After ice cream at the Neveria\* on the main drag we drove back to turtle camp. Sunday is family day and there are many Mexican families at the beach. It's windy but very pleasant. A volunteer at the turtle camp confirmed that one turtle has hatched so far today.  
(\* we realized too late that they had avocado ice cream!)

Sadly, we learned that the hatchling did not survive, so no march to the sea today. Turns out that Dec. & Jan. are the best months for turtle releases.

Back to camp for chicken tacos made with canned chicken breast we found in a local store (Kirkland brand). It was delicious and a good non-perishable travel food option.

A French family with two young children are camped next to us. I marvel at their courage and energy.

Monday March 6

San Jose

58° with a breeze. Stop for more canned chicken before heading south to Cabo San Lucas. Found a place to park on the street a few blocks from the marina, in the Mexican part of town that surrounds the tourist zone. The marina is the concentrated core of hotels, shops, restaurants, and tour boats. We'd heard that taking a boat ride to land's end was worth doing even for the non-touristically inclined. We strolled the Disneyesque promenade until a nice Mexican kid said a ride to land's end was only \$10 each - much less than we expected. There were six of us on the covered boat.

The driver was genuinely friendly and spoke good English. His practiced patter was nonetheless funny. (For example, when we drove past the cave on Lover's Beach he said it was a magic cave because "Two go in and three come out.") The ride was about 40 minutes. We saw yellowtail fish through the somewhat hazy glass bottom of the boat; the soaring rock formations that mark the divide between the Pacific Ocean and the Gulf of California; a colony of sea lions that smelled like a fish market on a hot day with no ice; and a humpback whale breaching 5 or 6 times in the ocean. Lots of boats were fishing a short way offshore. Several huge cruise boats anchored in the bay. People snorkelling, scuba diving, jet skiing, frying on sandy beaches, gorging on margaritas and tacos, parading in skimpy bikinis. Signs advertise spring break parties and dance clubs (We enjoyed the boat trip so much, and it was so much cheaper than we expected, that Grant gave the captain a \$10 tip. He was very skilled at handling the boat. Also on the boat was a mom and daughter from Georgia, who happened to be black. We enjoyed talking to them.) A hot day with a lovely breeze if you're near the water. Back at the hot car Grant noticed a taqueria across the street with two plump, smiling women serving quite a few customers. The tacos and quesadillas were

delicious. I had mushroom & cheese, Grant had potato & chorizo, and the quesadillas were chicken. 70 pesos, about \$3.50 total.

Grant wanted wifi so he could download a few library books, and had the smart idea that there was probably a Starbucks here. Sure enough there was.

About 1:00 we hit the high speed 4-lane road to San Jose del Cabo, careening past resorts and golf courses for about an hour. Grant drove and I got a little seasick and crabby - not from his driving but from the fast, curvy road. On the way out of Cabo we stopped at a campground to see if we wanted to spend the night, but it was \$35 for no hookups and we did not like the parking lot vibe or the pinched, smileless proprietress.

We like San Jose. Found a parking spot near the town plaza and sat in the shade near the old church (a mission of course) watching school kids and a few tour groups. The town feels like an older Mexican town, which it is, ~~is~~ compared to Cabo's half glitzy resorts, half inner-city-noise-&-traffic feel.

Had a delicious coconut ice cream bar from the "Pinguino" (penguin) ice cream vendor. Filled with chewy coconut chunks.

Made our way to The Baja Books & Maps

store hoping to get information about where we could park for the night. Bought a nice Baja map that's more detailed than the one we have and learned about a couple of places we can probably park.

Drove to the estuary and watched birds for a while: moorhens with electric orange beaks, cinnamon and blue-winged teals, shovelers, stilts. You park near the Hilton and there's a trail to the beach - a little bit flooded but passable on dry logs & rocks. There's a wooden observation tower. A few scaeters since it's a fresh water lagoon.

Tacos for dinner. Seems like it's getting dark earlier this far south (we're in the tropics now).  $74^{\circ}$  at 6:30 pm.

Parked on Centenario for the night. Lots of other cars parked here, so we shouldn't stand out.

Tuesday March 7

Los Bariles

An uneventful night. The street is a busy one but quieted down during the night.

Morning clouds and a breeze. Parked by the plaza and walked the low-key streets to the Mercado Municipal. Although there is a lot of garbage lying around in Mexico, the people are clean. Men and women sweep the streets and sidewalks in front of their homes and

businesses every day. It's one of the quintessential sites of Mexico. The market is small but nice. We bought plantain, avocado, zucchini, potatoes, and a mini cabbage from a produce vendor. The walk back was especially nice, down a quiet residential street. We liked San Jose, and of all the towns we've seen, this is the one we could most imagine living in. It felt prosperous, authentically Mexican, big enough for all the basics, but not too big.

Back on highway 1 north, we drove into Miraflores, a sleepy small town with a cute plaza. There was supposed to be a leather factory but we didn't see it.

The next stop was the Tropic of Cancer monument, where you can take a picture of ~~the~~ a globe that shows the tropic running through southern Baja.

Santiago is another small town with a cute plaza.

We drove the 13 km out to La Ribera but couldn't find any beach access. The town tried to develop a big marina and got shut down due to environmental concerns. Now it's in a not-really-usable limbo state. On the way back to highway 1 we stopped for a picnic under a shady tree next to a pink shrine. On the way out of there we saw a sign for Cabo and thought we were going the wrong way. It took us a

minute to realize we weren't even on highway 1.

Got to Los Bariles around 1:00. We did not like the vibe at Verdugo's campground - no water views, just campers packed together. Found Baja Sunrise just south of town where we have a beachfront spot, hot showers, clean bathrooms, and wifi for \$25 a night. It's very windy and the kitesurfers are flying across the waves. One of them has a rudder that lets the board ride a few feet off the waves. Looks like a smoother ride and a high-speed thrill. ~~Rest~~ 4-wheelers buzz back and forth on the beach. Our neighbors are sitting outside with mixed drinks, cigarettes, and sunburns. As for us, we're alternating between wifi, books, journaling, and naps. Guitar later. Sometimes I miss the sense of purpose and accomplishment my home activities give me, but I do love that we are escaping winter, seeing beautiful scenery, and learning to slow down.

The white sandy beach here stretches as far as the eye can see. It's hard to walk on though because it's soft sand and sloped. Sure is pretty to look at though!

Around 5:30 the wind died down and we cooked dinner: sauteed zucchini, and potatoes & eggs. It's a perfect evening: 70°, light breeze, half a moon, waves lapping. Paradise!

This campground is spotless, as if it's brand new. The fact that it's not in our camping guide means that it probably is.

Wednesday March 8 La Paz

Up to an orange ball of sunfire, wisps of cloud,  $60^{\circ}$ , and a light breeze. After a low-flow but hot shower, coffee by the beach, watching the fishermen drive a boat up onto the beach, unload a cooler of fish that one man could barely lift, and towing the boat higher onto the beach with a rope and a pickup. Drove into Los Bariles to go for a walk. The Hotel Palmas de Cortez grounds are gorgeous, with an infinity pool, swim-up bar, and beachfront dining. We have no interest in staying in a place like this, but it's beautiful to see.

The tide was going out so we were able to walk on the hard slope above the water. Colorful Gringo mansions line the beach, leaving very few access points for fishermen or the public.

The streets of town are dense with traffic, more than half are gringos on noisy ATVs. I hope other towns don't follow suit.

We bought expensive organic sweet corn from a roadside vendor, then hit the grocery store for supplies.

Back on highway 1 we stopped along the road in San Bartolo. The town is known for having water and farming in a palm-filled arroyo. Also for

its sweet vendors. We tried a coconut concoction that looked like it had chocolate in it but was in fact coconut with part of the husk ground up in it, and some spice that might have been black pepper. We took one bite and threw it away. The tamarind balls were tasty though they had big seeds and fiber mixed in. This vendor, like most, spoke enough English to explain her products and prices. You really can get by quite well down here without Spanish, and it's actually hard to find opportunities to use mine.

There were multiple signs pointing to the little town of San Antonio. The first one quickly petered out into a dirt track, so we turned around. The second one took us into a town with no sign of the church or main square. After attempting to follow the guidebook directions and finding ourselves on another dwindling dirt track, we turned around and stumbled onto the church.

We had our picnic by the plaza. The town was in a festive mood, with everyone carrying around cakes and cupcakes. Obesity appears very prevalent here, everywhere we've been.

On the way out of town we saw the main road into town. The streets are cobbled with large river rocks, which are picturesque but bumpy.

Heading north, the highway continues over winding curves through the mountains.

In La Paz we made our way to a pharmacy in a Walmart (the first time I've ever been in one and the last I hope). Google maps sent us on a wild goose chase - we had been warned not to trust it down here - but it did eventually get us there. They had Grant's medication (he'd accidentally forgotten to bring enough) but at a shocking price. So not all meds are cheaper down here.

Arrived at Maranatha campground about 3 pm. I had <sup>dellish</sup> carrot bread at the Exquisita cafe out front. It's overcast with a nice breeze. It's almost too cool in the shade without a sweatshirt. An American family is camped here with two young girls. There's a nice playground here and lots of space to run around. Watched another episode of La Niña on Netflix, which now lets you download shows to watch offline!

Thurs. March 9 Ciudad Constitución

Walked the La Paz malecón one last time in the cool breezy morning air. Grant called the salt air smell "malecognac." All the tawdry Carnaval booths and rides are down and the waterfront is much more attractive. It's a nice long walkway - about 3 miles - and we walked most of

the way down and back. Saw many pelicans fishing, and groups of them crashing into the water in tandem. They tuck their wings and plummet headfirst from up to 15 or 20 feet high.

We haven't worried about car security anywhere down here. It feels as safe as parking your car on the street in Kirkland, and maybe safer. We brought a brake lock but haven't used it.

Traffic lights here blink green before they turn yellow - very handy. Stop signs, on the other hand, can be devilishly hard to stop. Locals often don't, but they gringos are more likely to get a ticket.

Topes (pronounced toe-peys) are speed bumps. They can also be hard to spot, and if you don't slow down you could send your toupee flying or break an axle. Even at low speed stuff goes flying in the air. We stow things pretty solidly, but not as well as on a boat. Sometimes it's hard tell actual topes from "faux-peis".

Flat spots painted to look like topes.

Lots of road construction north of La Paz, and the new sections have wider lanes plus shoulders, compared to the original 9 1/2-foot lanes and no shoulders. The width is nice, but the speed is higher, so it's a tradeoff.

Forgot to mention that we saw cardón blooming south of here. The white flowers grow all over the cactus tops. They are apparently fragrant, and fertilized by bats at night (as

well as by insects during the day). The fruits look like fuzzy brown eyeballs.

We arrived in Ciudad Constitución (about 130 miles from La Paz) about 12:30, and had tacos at "Tacos Karen" on the main drag - abobo pork for Grant and grilled beef for me. She heated our choice of flour or corn tortillas on the grill, heated up the meat, and added cheese if we wanted. The meat was salty & tender. They serve a soupy guacamole with no chiles on the side, in addition to the usual condiments of onion, lime, and salsas. About \$6 for 5 tacos.

We drove the 32-mile paved road west to check out Puerto San Carlos.

It's got a deep water port (empty today), electrical generation station, aromatic fish processing plant, mangroves, estuaries, fishing boats, miles of dirt streets, and lots of garbage. Apparently a 2009 hurricane hit this community very hard. We had hoped to see birds but there wasn't much except the usual pelicans, gulls, egrets, and herons. We did see several ospreys, including one on a nest feeding a chick. There are quite a few man-made nesting platforms along the road.

We pulled into a lagoon-side parking area with palapas to see if it would be a good place to spend the night. Two local teens were hanging out

drinking beer and listening to Mexican music. The area was heavily strewn with litter and appeared to be day use only. We elected to drive back to Ciudad Constitución and stay at the Campestre and Balnearia La Pila. It's surprisingly lovely here, with two swimming pools, picnic tables, and shade trees. The deep pool is being used by a swim team of high school age kids. They are swimming many laps. We arrived about 4. It's now after 5 and they're still swimming. The camping is 200 pesos, about \$10. The nice young woman in the registration office gave me an orange. It was sweet but very membranous.

The pool is a community resource anyone can come and pay to use. Parents arrived and whisked their kids away, and now it's very quiet here. We are the only campers. The moon is  $\frac{3}{4}$  full and the sky is blazing red. Chicken tacos and fried plantains for dinner. Two puppies and a black cat came by as I was washing dishes. One of them picked up a clean, empty tupperware container and started backing away from me, looking up with big eyes to see if I'd object! There's a lovingly-cared-for vegetable garden on one side of the parking lot. There is wifi here. Each camping site has a water spigot and there are trees. It's basically a flat, dusty field, but surrounding by palm trees, on the outskirts of town. There's an outdoor fire burning at an adjacent house. It looks cozy and smells good.

Friday March 10

Loreto  
~~Santa Teresita~~

Feel asleep and woke to the sound of an owl hooting. A thick coastal fog greeted us when we looked outside, the palm trees silhouetted in monochrome. The air smells salty and feels sticky, even though we're 30 miles from salt water. 56°. Went for a walk down the dirt road to town, hoping the fog would burn off so we could find our way back! Saw a vermilion flycatcher. Swept a lot of sand out of the car.

Gassed up on the way out of town. The friendly attendant, a small older man missing some front teeth, told me that in the 2009 hurricane he lost his roof and it was a ~~#~~ terrible situation, with roads closed for days and very little food.

The road is 4-lane ~~beeto~~ between Constitución and Insurgentes. Then it winds through lush desert and over some mountains to the coast. Saw corn fields with drying plants. It's about 90 miles from Constitución to Loreto.

We arrived at the Rivera del Mar campground about 11:15. Laundry, lunch, showers, shopping, and shade day. It's cool & breezy under the picnic shelter, and quite toasty in the sun.

We've seen highway workers clearing rockfall out of ditches with shovels and wheelbarrows, and city workers in La Paz sweeping the malecón bike lane with brooms. Bigger cities have landscaped entrance boulevards that are well maintained.

Walked to town to look for avocado ice cream but no luck. Then down for a nice stroll on the malecón, where there was the perfect mix of warm sun and cool breeze. Back to camp for guitar and showers, then decided to go out to dinner, as we were too lazy to button up the van to go shopping. We picked a restaurant we'd seen a few blocks south, that appeared popular. Turns out they specialize in clams, but we ordered fish tacos and fish cutlets, which were disappointing. There was no avocado sauce so I ate my fish taco plain\*, and Grant's cutlet took so long to arrive that I had long since finished my meal. And then they told us they didn't have beans (the fish was supposed to come with). It was a "splurge" meal for us at about \$12, but we much prefer the \$5 taco stands we've been eating at. It did have a nice atmosphere and is probably a great place to get clams.

\*I can't eat anything spicy, so no salsas.

Tried sitting outside but the mosquitoes chased us in. There are two German couples here with big custom 4-wheel rigs. One said they had their rig shipped from Hamburg to Halifax for about \$3000 euros. They've been on the road eight months and are heading to South America.

Saturday March 11 San Ignacio

A warm night. We both had bad dreams - maybe from being too hot? Went for a nice walk along the waterfront - where the temperature was perfect and a nice breeze was gently cooling - and back through town. Stopped at Chuco's hardware store, a well-stocked place with a very kind proprietor. His wife runs a small grocery store across the street which we would have been happy to patronize, but it didn't have some of the things we needed. After stocking up at the Super Ley we hit the road about 9:45.

After a while we saw Bahía Concepción again and were reminded how stunning it is. There's not a breath of wind and the water is flat and still.

In Mulege we drove to the beach at the mouth of the river, and parked

on the rounded cobbles for a picnic. Very warm, but nice sound of gentle waves. Bought date bread on the way out of town. A bit dry but pretty good. Up over windy mountains.

Drove through Santa Rosalía to see the French-style wood houses from the mining days of the early 1900s. Too hot to walk.

Back through the chunky black lava flows of Las Tres Virgenes. Arrived in San Ignacio about 4:00. Parked in the plaza, found out there won't be carnitas tonight (only on Sundays) and had pistachio ice cream.

Now we're at Rice and Beans campground. 250 pesos. It's 90° at 5 pm with a hot, desiccating wind, and some biting bugs. Hooray for our mosquito nets! Rice and beans and tostadas for dinner. A huge and bright full moon!

Sunday March 12

Punta  
Abreojos

Time change last night. A pleasantly cool night. Light clouds this morning. Hit the road for Abreojos, a town on the Pacific Coast about 50 miles NE of San Ignacio.

Swaths of lupine line the road. Another military checkpoint just north of San Ignacio. I don't mind them. The soldiers have all been quite sweet. I think it helps if you speak Spanish. I think they mostly speak rudimentary English

and seem grateful to be able to speak Spanish instead.

The road west to Abreojos is paved and in pretty good condition, with some potholed sections. The desert floor is a carpet of pink, yellow, purple, and orange flowers. The sky is still overcast.

The town of Abreojos boasts 600 people, a Pemex station, a few small stores, a short waterfront promenade with a playground, and lots of fishing boats and shrimp pots. It reminded us of the reservation towns on the Olympic Peninsula. It feels remote and isolated.

We tried to find Campo Rene, the campground, but the signage was minimal, and the area between the road and the beach is crosshatched with dirt roads.

We ended up going the wrong way.

We saw a guy (gringo) in a pickup truck boondocking and he said we could just stay out here for free.

There's another trailer here as well, with a young couple and a dog. It's beautiful, with a firm gray sand beach, fairly flat; abalone shells; gentle waves rolling in, and an occasional dolphin cruising past.

There's supposed to be good bird watching out here, but we haven't seen much.

The tide is going out, so we're waiting a bit before we go walking.

There's a two-story building nearby. We're told it's where guards come to watch for abalone poachers (and poachers of other protected species). My first thought when we get to a place like this is, what will we do all day? What do these other people do all day? But then I settle in to my chair and the beauty and serenity overtake me and I feel I could stay here forever. 74° with a nice breeze.

Went for a long walk on the firm, gently sloping beach. This is our favorite walking beach in Baja so far. Only one gringo house as far as the eye can see. The rocks here are an unusual conglomerate that looks like pieces of a busted up slab of exposed aggregate concrete. Watched a little blue heron chase its food in the shallows, zigzagging this way and that on its spindly legs, flexible neck bending at zany angles. It was quite comical. Saw a seal, inexplicably on shore, skootch its way back into the water. The wind is picking up. Spaghetti for dinner. By 7 it was chilly for sitting outside.

We have seen a lot of ospreys. Their population seems to be quite healthy down here. Still mostly cloudy. There are no pelicans. If we picked a place down here to spend time, we would want to see pelicans.

There are people to both sides of us, maybe 100 yards away. We thought of going

to say hi, but it somehow feels like invading their space. People who choose these empty wild places seem to want solitude. I marvel at the solo guy who has pretty much spent all day alone. He says he stays here for days. Ah, now I see him out surfing.

The full moon rose as the sun set, a blaze of sunset oranges and reds. Lots of flies here, but they stop flying at dark.

→ Monday March 13 Guerrero Negro  
59° at 8 am.

Drove to Campo Rene, and now that we know which direction to go, it was easy to find and an excellent, smooth dirt road. It's right on the lagoon, with shaded patio areas. We saw yellow-crowned night herons, white ibis, and herons perched in the mangroves, and mergansers, scaup, Brant geese, and many shore birds in the shallow water. Watched a dolphin swim across the lagoon. We're told that many coyotes live here (that's why it's called Estero del Coyote or Coyote Lagoon). They can be seen crossing the estuary when the water's lower, and often hunt birds.

Used the spotting scope for the first time and were glad to have it.

Went for a nice long walk along the estuary. The beach is thick with several kinds of clam shells, lobster shells, mangrove leaves, and kelp. Nice beach for walking. Saw a live crab, about 2" shell, blueish legs. Warm in the sun but delightful in the shade. Camping here is 150 pesos, or about \$8. Clean restrooms with soap, tp, and paper towels.

Back to Abreojos for ice, then on the road about 1:30. Arrived at Kadekaman campground in Vizcaino about 3:30. It was hot there and not super appealing so we pushed on to Guerrero Negro, arriving about 4:30. It's 185 pesos, about \$10. It's called malarrimo. It's a fenced lot with trees, wifi, hot showers, and a restaurant. The latter gets rave reviews so we took a chance. I had a chicken and mushroom dish that wasn't great and Grant had fish burritos that also weren't great. We loved the lentil soup with saltine crackers though. Total 260 pesos with tip, about \$13. They were playing pleasant jazz music.

The desert was in spectacular bloom today - absolutely gorgeous carpets of color.

Grant discovered a beverage he loves: "Limón y nada" (clever name). No sugar, so he can drink it. They also have Jamaica and Orange versions, but they aren't as good.

Tuesday March 14 San Quintín  
255 miles

Very foggy this morning, and cool. Headed north on highway 1 driving slowly, with low visibility. An hour or so inland the fog cleared, revealing a sea of desert flowers in every color of the rainbow! I couldn't stop taking pictures. The flowers were especially thick along the road edges, and would vary from place to place. Miles of yellow daisy-like brittlebush, then miles of pale orange mallow, or purple-blue lupine, magenta sand verberna, and countless others I couldn't identify. We couldn't believe how lush and green and colorful the desert was!

We were happy to see that the most potholed section of road, around Catawina was being surveyed, hopefully for repairs, and that some of the potholes had been recently filled.

We crossed back into Baja north today and are back on Pacific time. Arrived at Rancho Santa Inez about 11:30 and parked under one of the trees for a picnic lunch of tostadas, cheese, avocado, and mango and baby carrots - our new favorite lunch. Lunch meat is hard to get here and we don't want to worry about keeping it cold enough to not spoil. Also we just love tostadas!

There was a hot dry wind blowing so we didn't go walking.

It was a day of incredible natural beauty. On top of the plump, rain-swollen cardón; green leaves sprouting on every shrub and tree; and the acres of wildflower carpet; we also got to see cirio trees, elephant trees, white agave blossoms, escarpments, cinder cones, and boulder gardens. We wished we could somehow imprint it on our eyes and not have to leave it behind.

In Mexico you see many eating establishments called "Loncherias." This comes from the English word "lunch."

I think the desert between ~~Rosario~~ El Rosario and Guerrero Negro may be our favorite part of Baja, if we had to choose one, which would not be easy. South of El Rosario we crossed the mountains, the road often perched on the very spine. It feels very wild and remote.

In El Rosario we stopped for ice and were told that it last rained about two weeks ago. People are so gentle and friendly here. I was holding a bag of ice and everyone insisted I go ahead of them in line.

We arrived at Fidel's El Pabellon Campground in San Quintín about 3:30. We're back in the fog. The campground is right on the beach, with only one other camper here. There are hot showers, (weak) wifi,

and water spigots. \$5 per person.

I went for a long walk on the flat, firm beach. A few local cars on the beach, and three young men fishing in the surf with a net, but other than that just me, the fog, the surf, shorebirds, and some flies. Otherworldly.

Fidel came around to collect the money, a very friendly ~~guy~~ guy with a round face, ~~and~~ an easy laugh and a ready handshake.

Eggs and beans and tostadas for dinner. A quiet, foggy night.

Wednesday March 15 Ensenada

Ian turns 27 today! Cool and foggy this morning. The fog is heavy and damp, almost like a light rain.

We could have slept for free on the beach next to the campground, but besides the security peace of mind, paying for camping is a way to support the local economy, which is very dependent on tourism.

Stopped for gas and the attendant told me the fog is unusual. The fog was dense on the road and the wipers weren't clearing well. Finally it occurred to us to stop and clean them. What a concept - no more streaks. They were

as thick with dust as the rest of the car.

There are many "telesecundarias" which are apparently online high schools in rural areas.

We passed through a lot of farmland, workers silhouetted in the fog. Traffic got heavier as we got farther north. I was white knuckles much of the time as we dodged potholes, semis, and moved right to let cars pass without veering off the road (there are mostly no shoulders). Sometimes it feels like a carnival ride that won't end - and I do not like carnival rides. Finally Grant couldn't take my kvetching anymore and let me drive.

The fog lifted when we turned inland at Colón. Beautiful green agricultural country.

Ensenada felt more touristy than last time. Had fish tacos at a different place - not as good as last time (fish batter not as crispy). Walked up and down the short malecón a few times for exercise, but got tired of all the touts trying to get our business. Saw American kids on spring break acting foolish, wearing skimpy clothes. Drinking age is 18 here.

Paid a nice man 25 pesos to wash our windows while we grocery shopped. I wasn't sure what to pay him - he said "pay whatever you like" - Jane had told us it's 50 pesos to wash a whole car.

We're camping at "Centro Recreativo mi Refugio," south of Ensenada on the road to La Bufadora. The English-speaking owners' house is a castle motif, with crenelated towers. It's on the estuary. 50 pesos per person. A simple, friendly place, nothing special. There's a noisy "dirt quarry" across the road, but that settled down at dark. At low tide there were dozens of shorebirds out on the mud flats.

Later we drove out to La Bufadora, a touristy spot at the end of the road where water crashes up out of a hole at high tide. It's a tourist nightmare. The first thing you see are pay parking lots. If you keep going you enter a 1/4 mile long tunnel of vendors. It keeps going and going until you feel trapped. We were able to turn around and get out of there.

Back at camp the wind had died down. We have a great view of the bay. Eggs and potatoes for dinner. We already miss the remote, quiet places we stayed farther south. We're now in close-to-the-border, everyone-speaks-English, limbo land of sorts.

Grant liked this campground, especially the view of the city lights across the bay. It was quiet at night (except for some barking) and fairly dark.

Thursday March 16 San Felipe

Many Campgrounds down here cost about \$300 a month, so many people park trailers longterm. The salt air is hard on them. Empty, rusting trailers can be pretty depressing looking. Way cheaper than buying property though, and great income for the campground owner.

On the road about 8, back through the endless urban sprawl and traffic chaos of Ensenada, onto highway 3 east to San Felipe. Fields of cultivated flowers in bloom. Light fog, perfect temp.

The road across the mountains was beautiful, though many potholes. Unbelievably green. Near San Matias we stopped for a picnic lunch. Flowers galore, including red-orange "scarlet bugler." Cactus and boulders. The high point is supposedly 4000'.

The east side of the mountains was drier and more barren. The traffic was blissfully light. Arrived at Playas del Sol campground, north of San Felipe, about 1:30. It's hot but there are shade ramadas and a light breeze. This part of the coast is quite barren - just brown land and blue sea. The beach looks nice for walking. Noisy at the moment, as workers are running a compactor in the hot sun. Caspian terns fishing.

San Felipe is only a few hours south of the border and a popular weekend getaway, so there is a lot of development here, and real estate for sale.

Went into San Felipe about 4, when it wasn't quite so hot. The malecón is very short. There's a clean sandy beach where you can rent shade canopies and chairs. Lots of Mexican people swimming and picnicing. The waterfront businesses are mostly bars and restaurants and trinket vendors. I was dismayed to see a table dancing business.

San Felipe is one of my least favorite towns in Baja. It feels tacky and touristy.

Back at camp we ate up our food that can't go back across the border tomorrow - eggs, grapefruit, avocado. There are a lot of flies here, but luckily they go away at dark. No mosquitoes. Sitting outside with a gentle breeze, waves lapping. We're going to miss this!

The Sea of Cortez this far north is like a lake - flat and still with no waves.  $86^{\circ}$  at 4 pm. Very large, spiny dead fish on the beach, about 3 feet long. For some reason the birds aren't eating it.

Friday March 17

Gila Bend AZ

Tried walking on the beach this morning but the sand was soft and the beach inclined, so it wasn't a long walk. The cliffs above the beach are about 20 feet tall and made of sand. Buildings and RVs are right up to the edge. Where the cliff is crumbling people have built makeshift retaining walls out of tires and rocks, concrete and rebar. Like many things in Mexico, this would never be allowed in the U.S. It's sad to see Mexico's waterfront being sold off to the highest bidder. By the time they adopt regulations to preserve public waterfront it will be too late.

The campground owner showed up to collect 250 pesos (about \$13) and we hit the road about 9. The road from San Felipe north is like a freeway: smooth, wide, with no potholes, and shoulders.

The drive north is fairly bleak, through salt flats and mineral hills. Very little vegetation, but the ocotillo are blooming and the bright red blossoms waving on the tips are cheery. The colorful hills remind us of Death Valley. We think this is the least scenic part of Baja.

We took the east border crossing through Calexico. Luckily we had Google maps to find the way, as it is not marked. The wait was said to be 20 minutes here instead of 60 at the

Mexicali crossing, and you also bypass some of the Mexicali center. Once in line we were besieged by vendors, sweltering in the heat. What a tough way to make a living. Two squeegee men approached us. We said no. They proceeded to soap up our windshield. I rolled down the window and said no. They kept cleaning. Soon they had washed the whole car!

I was mad because how could I not pay them after all that work in the hot sun? And the van really did need a wash. But I also didn't want to reward them for ignoring my "no".

One of them was a beautiful teen with a cute haircut, a baby face, and a worried, unsmiling face. Of course I tried to imagine one of my boys having to make a living that way. In the end I gave him 30 pesos and told him he shouldn't ignore people when they say no, but that I appreciated how hard he was working. Then the older man asked us for drinking water and seemed surprised when we said we didn't have any bottles. He found an empty container and we filled that up.

It took maybe 30 minutes to get through the border and they didn't scrutinize us at all. We smuggled in an avocado... There is

no posted list of what you can't bring in, so if we hadn't seen a list in our guidebook we wouldn't have known.

On highway 98 we found a pulloff with some shade for a belated lunch. It was very hot.

American roads are so fast, with no potholes or speed bumps! Even urban sprawl Yuma looked attractive compared to Mexican towns with their unregulated masses of signs and billboards. Mexico is what the U.S. would look like if we had no zoning regulations.

We stopped for groceries in Yuma, where it was  $94^{\circ}$  in the shade. Many delays on interstate 8 with construction and a border patrol inspection station. We were thinking of driving to Organ Pipe tonight, but it was a long way. We wouldn't have arrived until about 6:30. The universe provided: we saw a sign for Painted Rock Petroglyph Site and it had a camping symbol! It's just west of Gila Bend, and only 11 miles north of I-8. It's a BLM campground, \$4 with our discount. Clean outhouses, picnic tables, fire pits, and covered picnic shelters.  $93^{\circ}$  at 5 pm. Beef tacos for dinner. Sponge baths. Flaming red sunset. Bugs. No lights - yay! Mexican campgrounds are generally well lit, making it hard to see stars, or sleep without curtains.

Lolo

Saturday March 18 PHX

48° at 7 am. Nice long walk on desert road before it got too hot. We really like this campground and would definitely come back here.

On the road to Phoenix. Beautiful flowers along I-85. Arrived at mom and dad's about 11:30. Afternoon at the pool. It's in the 90s here. Singalong at the pool after dinner with some of the local residents.

Sunday March 19 PHX

Walking with mom in the morning. Dad's back is hurting and he couldn't walk. Dad and Grant went to Costco. I helped Dad with a few projects. Mark came over and we chatted in the pool and got caught up. Emma came over for dinner. Grant grilled steaks that everyone loved. Emma and Mark had a little tension going on, which was a little stressful. But all in all it was a lovely gathering.

Monday March 20

Kingman AZ

A bit of a stressful day. Went to the car shop with dad and he got mad at them because there was a misunderstanding about what he wanted done, so he ended up getting nothing done.

Then during lunch mom and I had an argument about whether kids need religion. She thinks they do and I adamantly think they don't. And dad was crabby and sniping at mom. Mom says he's been especially hard to live with lately. Perhaps his health problems are making him less tolerant. In any case I think 48 hours was too much togetherness. Next time we'll limit it to 36.

Then we had a dead battery again and the car was making strange and worrisome noises. We did not want to spend another day in Phoenix so we hit the road anyway.

The drive up 93 was gorgeous: wildflowers, saguaro, and blooming, big Joshua Trees.

We arrived at Hualapai Mt. Park campground around 5 pm. It cost \$17, wasn't very nice, and was cold, so we drove back down the road to where we had seen some people boondocking. We found a beautiful spot surrounded by pinyon pine and juniper, with a view down into a

valley with wrinkled hills beyond.  $74^{\circ}$  at 5 pm but dropping fast. Gusts of wind. "Nachos" for dinner: chicken taco meat, refries, cheese, salsa, chips. 4800' elevation! We noticed several campgrounds on highway 93. Good to know for future trips.

Tuesday March 21 Valmy NV

In the middle of the night the radio clock turned on. We realized there must be a short in the radio that was causing the battery to drain, and causing the strange noises we were hearing. Grant got up and dressed at 2 am and pulled the radio fuse. Problem solved for now! It was surprisingly warm out.

On the road at 7:30. Partly cloudy. 95 north. We like the Nevada scenery: vast expanses of sky, multi-colored mineral hills, sweeping sage-covered plains and sand dunes.

The day grew windy and rainy. These are high plains, often over 6000'. In Austin we crossed a 7500' pass. There were still patches of snow there, and the rain was just turning to slush. 376 and 305 north. These are great rural roads through rangeland with

light traffic. Snow-dusted mountains all around. Tumbleweeds flying across the road.

In Battle Mountain we ate at the Owl Club restaurant, a friendly diner where we stuffed ourselves for \$20 including a big tip. We split a broasted chicken dinner with mashed potatoes, soup, salad, and rolls. Way more than enough food for two people. It was cold, rainy, and windy, or we would have cooked our own dinner.

Settled in for the night at the Valmy Rest Area on I-80, 13 miles west of Battle Mountain. It's a nice one, not right next to the road, and lightly used. The rain has stopped and the sky is pink.

Wednesday March 22 John Day OR

A chilly night. 40° inside the car this morning. Overcast. I-80 east to Winnemucca. The sky begins to clear. Snowy ranges all around. Fine yellow grass growing thickly between the sage bushes - Grant said it looked like Johnny Winters' hair. 95 north.

This is basin and range country - broad, sloping basins between fault block ranges. It's high desert, well above 4000', and the peaks of the snow-dusted ranges rise above 9000'. Isolated cattle ranches, flooded fields, lots of standing water.

Took the highway 140 cutoff to Denio. The sign said "No gas for 179 miles." It's a lonely, empty road - we loved it. Saw two women and a couple of dogs moving a big herd of sheep across the road. Few cars, no trucks, beautiful scenery. Cowboys herding cows. It got me thinking about why people would rather go to Mongolia or Argentina to see cowboys/horsemen than to the American west.

One reason is that other places are more exotic, but another reason could be that when you can't communicate verbally you don't have to find out if your political and religious beliefs clash. I don't think I could talk to the average Nevada cowboy for more than a short while before banging into huge political and religious differences.

Picnic lunch in ever-quirky Frenchglen. Quite chilly for wading. Saw a few sandhill cranes and a trumpeter swan. Drove the Mathews Center Patrol Road from Diamond Lane to the visitor center, about 20 miles. The water level is very high. Only saw a pheasant and a coyote. (Lots of prairie dogs in Frenchglen.)

The visitor's center is still being renovated after being occupied by a militia group two(?) years ago (they trashed the place). Rain squalls off & on.

curtains of rain dancing around the sky.  
 Driving north on 395 we saw a lot of flooding. Apparently they had a lot of snow here this year and the melt is causing flooding. Up into pine forest, lots of burn scars, yellow and orange willows lighting up the stream beds with color, like fall color in the spring. Snow still on the roadside. It's the tail end of winter here.

Arrived at Mytch and Jan Mead's house about 3:30. Hung out a lot with 6-year-old Cassidy, who loves his trampoline and dancing. Saw a double, almost triple, rainbow. Briefly met their German exchange student, Dana. Salmon for dinner.

Thursday March 23

Yakima WA

31° this morning! Frost on the car. Our propane heater ran out of gas. Remember to check the level before going to bed next time. We don't run it while we're sleeping, just before bed, to take the chill off, and when we're getting dressed in the morning.

Goodbye to Mytch and on the road at 9 am. Car wouldn't start, and I noticed one tire was low. Mytch gave us a jump and we headed down the hill to Les Schwab where they found a screw, repaired the tire, and had us on our way in no time.

A beautiful sunny day. 26 west. Wild turkeys in a field. John Day Fossil Beds National Monument Sheep Rock unit. Hiked the 1.3-mile-round-trip Island in Time trail, into the Blue Basin, so called because the rock here is blue with copper. Beautiful. The area is in a gorgeous valley with a river and the smell of sage. Many ranches, many contented cows, many small calves.

26 east to the Painted Hills unit of John Day Fossil Beds. Walked the 1/2-mile-round-trip Painted Hills ~~at~~ Overlook trail with stunning views of the red, white, green, and black striped hills. Yellow avalanche lilies blooming.

Back west a bit to 207 north and 19 north. Rimrock all around us. People wave on this back road.

Climbed up to Condon and wheat country, then 207 to the Columbia River and 97 to Yakima.

Stopped at the St. John's Monastery Bakery on Satus Pass. A nun in Orthodox habit. Lots of yummy pastries and savories, but they're pricey, and we weren't in need of anything. Also religious paintings and paraphernalia for sale. Everything made by the priests and nuns. An interesting stop.

Arrived at Miner's restaurant close to Le. Grant had a tuna melt and I had a quite tasty chicken bacon salad. It's a very loud and crowded place. Glad I had earplugs as their PA system is ear-splitting.

Spending the night at the east Cowiche Canyon trailhead. It does not have a "no overnight parking" sign and were hoping we won't be hassled. We'd like to hike the canyon in the morning before heading home.

Friday March 24 Home

Woke to steady rain. Slept great. No hiking today. On the road at 8. Gas & groceries in Cle Elum. Home at 11am.