

Maiden voyage of new Promaster Van

1

Mexico

3024 odometer

Dec 27, 2021 - Up at 5:15, 15°.

Sun & sparkles when it got light. Winter Wonderland. Walked to 87th intersection to confirm that it had been sanded.

On the road at 9:10. Freeway slushy but passable, 40 mph, wrecks everywhere.

19° in Renton, 24° ~~by~~ Puyallup. Road bare in Tacoma. So many cars spun out, fender benders, a semi tipped over, pathway. So many bummed out drivers facing huge expenses, not to mention how scary an accident can be.

Maytown rest area packed with people taking a break from the driving stress. Ankle deep slush. 25° & clear road in Centralia. Lunch at Toutle River rest area.

Arrive at <sup>5th</sup> cousin Don Arner's in Beaverton at 2. Grant napped while I went in. Friendly man & his wife is lovely. He's 88, still spry. We went through his Arner archives to figure out what I need to scan for the website. He'll send it up with his neighbor in the spring. Back on the road at 4. Portland area got light snow; roads bare & wet, 31°.

Not a lot of heat in the van. We had it cranked all day and it never got too warm. Dinner at Subway north of Eugene.

Too snowy at Al & Marilyn's to spend the night there. <sup>friends</sup> Also had to cancel visits to <sup>mike Gestach &</sup> Judy Gregoire due <sup>to weather</sup> 33-34° and light snow after dinner.

Pee break + brush teeth at

7 Feathers rest area up on a hill.

32° + snowing. Decided to keep going to Mary Z's in Medford where we could plug in + use our little electric heater.

Arrived at Mary's at 10 pm. This van is more comfortable to sit in. ~~than our old van.~~  
Also quieter, easier to talk. Listened to surf music driving over the <sup>Siskiyou</sup> foothills. Four passes from 1700 to 2000 feet. The roads had been sanded so weren't slippery.

Tues Dec. 28

So nice to have our little electric heater plugged in all night. Slept like logs. Didn't wake til 6:45. 30° and very light snow accumulation in the night. Stop at rest area to brush teeth, gas up north of Ashland, and on the road at 8:30.

Pass a plow and de-icer. Road wet, lightly snowing, 33°. Cooled down to about 23° (?) at the mt. Ashland, aka Siskiyou, summit.

(We hung the shoehorn on the hook with the fly swatter and now call it hornsawatter hook (sounds like hornsawoggle).)

Huge kudos to Washington State Patrol personnel, who were out in force helping people yesterday, and to the road crews who were plowing, sanding, and de-icing through the night.

We were surprised there were no labor or supply shortages, both of which have been a big problem everywhere lately, due to covid.

Flurries of fat snowflakes fell as we crossed the high desert (3000') of northern CA, oak trees and sagebrush sprinkled with white. Arrived at the Weed rest area at 10.

The sky was brightening and there were a few sunglasses moments when we got back on the freeway. But soon everything darkened a bit. A "bad spinout" accident had blocked the freeway. At a roadblock they required chains and sent us off on the exit to put ours on. (Luckily we had some from Grant's mazda that fit, and we brought them, and Grant had reviewed how to put them on before we left.) It was cold & windy, but we got them on fairly quickly. They had told us the stretch to Dunsmuir would be icy, but it was bare & wet all the way.

<sup>with chains</sup> We couldn't exceed 30 mph and cars were flying past us. It was kind of meditative driving so slowly, and the vibration was hypnotic. We de-chained at a Dunsmuir offramp. We had kept our flashers on too. We'd forgotten about 4000' Black Butte Summit, but the road there was fine. The wreck was cleared so no detour required, and the backup wasn't too long.

Lunch at pleasant Lakehead rest area.

38°. Nap at Sundial Bridge. We were tired from the winter driving, and relieved to be done with it. Raining here.

Walked for a while on the river trail. Cold. Fly fishermen standing in the river. How do they stay warm? Park decorated with lights. Paid entry, but we could see some of the display from the trail.

My stress level is high. Worried about winter driving. Grant and I had our usual first day fight about driving but today was better.

Called my cousin Kathleen to see if we could come a day early and she said yes. Drove to Williams Chinese Restaurant. Take-out only, which was probably a blessing due to Covid. We set up our little tables and had our own private restaurant, complete with lighting. Quite cosy. Nice to eat a big plate of sauteed vegetables. Arrived Dunnigan rest area 8 pm. 42° and raining. Thick traffic.

Rest area bathroom door propped open due to Covid. Brrr! Raindrops on the roof. Journal, read, crash.

Wed Dec 29

Up at 6:30. 39°. Hard rain all night. Even with earplugs, sounded like someone pouring buckets of BBs on the roof. Hoping the thick black road snow grime is getting washed off the van! Coffee-making setup (stinger)

## Winters CA

5

works great. We were plenty warm enough without ~~the~~ heater.

Heading south, the world was green! California is getting deluged with rain. Green hills, fields, grazing cows. Arrived in Winters about 9:30. My second cousin Kathleen Epps Smith met<sup>us</sup> at Lorenzo's Market & we followed her back to her house, two miles south of town. She lives on a rise on 27 acres, with sweeping views of the coast mountains and surrounding agricultural area. Her land includes a walnut orchard (English walnuts grafted onto black walnut trunks, creating a lovely two-tone trunk: black plinth and brown pillars). Kathleen's brother Richard lives on the property with his partner, Mo (Maureen). They are super nice and we had a lovely visit. Kathleen showed me some of the paintings her grandma Eleanor made. Kathleen has many beautiful art deco lamps & furniture pieces. She served heirloom fruit pastries from a local bakery. We finally tore ourselves away at 1:40. She lives on Wintu Way, has beautiful art deco lamps.

We drove back into Winters (which has a cute small downtown), parked, and ate our leftover Chinese food cold. It was too late to make it to Pinnacles before dark, so we drove back to Erreca rest area on I-5 (via 505, 113, & 12). Ag roads through flooded fields. Big flocks of large white birds: swans, egrets, & snow geese. At one point the radio display stopped working (including the backup

camera) and we were so bummed.

We stopped for gas and after the car was turned off for 10 minutes the radio started working again. What a relief!

Arrived at Erreca rest area about 5:30. 49° & light rain. Not a good RA: no signal & no flat spots...

Cold dinner - sandwiches & olives. Our rotated chairs & little tables work so great. I was also able to comfortably wash dishes inside by setting the big cutting board on the bed, putting the dish tubs on that, and using cold water.

Thurs. ~~Wednesday~~ Dec 30

Up at 6:15 43°. On the road 7:50, after cozy coffee & breakfast in our nook.

Golden light visible through cloud breaks on horizon. South to exit 379 and rural road J1. It winds through fuzzy green hills & fields. Cowboys on horseback herding cattle. Sage & gnarled oak trees. Potholed road, narrow, no shoulder. Giving the van a good rattle fest. Only a few new noises appeared.

What looked like a square-edged lake filling a valley turned out to be a huge solar farm. In the tiny enclave of Panoche, a sign on the Spanish Cattle Co. fence said, "Stop Solargen, Save Panoche."

The road climbed into a fog bank, narrowed to one lane, and skirted a cliff. Luckily we could hug the inside

## Pinnacles N.P.

7

edge, and we didn't meet any oncoming vehicles! In fact we saw only 8 vehicles total in 35 miles (took about an hour). All waved.

Panoche Pass 2250°. Canyons, arroyos, cattle ranches, pines. Patches of blue sky. A surprising cluster of 20 mailboxes. Are oak trees protected in CA? Seven male turkeys displaying for one female in a field, tails spread & swiveling, wings held out drooping and rounded like batoneras.

West at highway 25 junction (the route we would have taken from I-5 if we hadn't driven so far south last night). Heavy fog, tight corners, then suddenly blue sky, a full dome.

Arrive Pinnacles N.P. at 10 am. Two spots left in campground, both electric. \$55 a night! We paid half with our discount (senior pass). They had seven inches of rain in the past two days!

Warm in the sun!

After lunch we waited about 40 minutes to catch a shuttle (they run every 20 minutes, long line). Saw what I'm almost certain were two condors soaring above the hills to the west. They were backlit, so I couldn't see the wing markings, but they had the more flared wings & tail & looked much bigger than vultures.

We took the Bear Caves trail. It was crowded. The ranger had said it was easy to moderate. It started out easy, along a stream with lovely views of golden brown, lichen-covered, rounded rock formations. Then it forked. We went left to the caves.

Super scary for me. Dark, narrow, slippery, with many steps, & low ~~spat~~ ceilings. Grant had to crawl on his knees through one stretch. Thank goodness it was a loop and we didn't have to retrace our steps. Flashlight required. The trail back was a bit narrow, steep, and slippery. The ranger said it had rained over inches over the past two days! Many puddles. December is rainy season. Many languages spoken on trail. Park is near Bay Area.

Grant took the shuttle back and I walked, 2.3 miles to CG on Sycamore & Bench trails. Easy, beautiful trail along a ferny stream, with very few people. Clouds but no rain. Coyote trotting up a trail on the other side of the ~~rain~~ road.

Back to camp at 4, 54°. Grant saw turkeys in camp. Cooked inside with fan running and stove on teflon cutting board on bed. Worked great. Turkey quesadillas. CG staff very nicely asked if we'd consider switching sites to help a big rig that didn't fit in the site they reserved. I walked over to look at the site. It wasn't very level. Luckily they found another option for the guy. Hard to stay awake past 8:30. Not much signal at park; it winked in and out. Slept w/o long johns and turned heater off. Started to feel cold in early AM.

Grant played DJ.

Burbank

9

Fri Dec 31

Up at 5:30, 39°. On the road a little after 7, when it was light enough to see. High clouds but no rain. South on 25 to 198 to the 101. Added about 30 min. to the drive, but we wanted to avoid 1-5. 25 was cattle ranches along a quiet country road. A little fog on 198. 101 is the historic Camino Real, with quaint light posts. Few semis and more attractive & serene than 1-5. Green rolling hills, 56° and sunny!

Stopped at Vista point south of Gaviota. Warm sun, cold breeze. Finally took off my long underwear! Nice picnic lunch.

Arrived at David & Annie's in Burbank at 2 pm. Their <sup>new</sup> party got cancelled because <sup>host's</sup> (neighbor's) daughter has covid. We picked oranges off the tree & Ava ~~squeezed~~ squeezed an entire pitcher of juice. Pasta, salad, and lots of treats for dinner. The neighbors sent over some of the party food: shrimp, sushi, cake, biscotti. Lots of yakking, a bit of guitar with David. Crash at 10. Chilly out. Predicted low 39°.

Sat Jan 1, 2022

Put on second quilt, slept with long johns, and was toasty warm. Slept til 7. Car wash at 10:30 - got the last spot. Grant crabby, lots of bickering. Too much togetherness? TMT = TNT 54° & sunny.

Wash car at Zeavy's coin-op. Walk around downtown Burbank (not the quaint part). Long walk with David after lunch. Tai chi in warm sun. Neighbor brought over chile rellenos. Too spicy for me, but Grant says delicious.

Sun Jan 2

Nice morning walk with Grant. 39° last night. High was over 60°. After lunch we drove to visit 2nd cousin Cat Harris & her daughter Maria in Pasadena. They said we missed a historically rainy December here. (It is now raining in Kirkland after a week of snow and below-freezing temps.) We had a delightful 2.5-hour visit. They have two adorable Swedish Vallhunds. David & Annie went out to dinner with friends. We made a gingerbread house with Ava & watched the Pixar movie "Soul." Ava is 7 1/2 and very artistic & capable.

Mon Jan 3

39° at 6:30, 63° at 3 pm. Went to Burritec to weigh van. Really nice guy

## Burbank

Working the scale noticed that our registration already lists the scale weight. Lowe's to buy a new shelf bracket to replace the loose one. Miserable trip to Target (depressing store) where we found three out of 10 things we were looking for. Everything was so hard to find!

Grant prepped tuna & egg salad for road lunches. I organized the van. Rigged up a bungee cord wrap to prevent table tops from sliding out of overhead storage bin (happened yesterday, scared the crap out of us, table miraculously undamaged).

Hiked Stough Canyon with David late afternoon. He made a wonderful steak & chicken BBQ with veggies & a caesar salad (made by Annie with delicious homemade dressing).

Tues Jan 4

Up at 6:30. 43° at 8 am. Another blue sky sunny day. Leave David's at 9, Lowe's for more shelf brackets, ATM for dental money. Park by library in Redlands at noon. Walked through Smiley Park then south on Alvarado St. admiring the beautiful craftsman homes.

At 1:00 met cousin Gretchen Stangl and her brother Rudy at Huichol's Tacos.

Ate vegetarian burritos at a table outside and chatted for two hours. Brother David had recommended driving part of highway 38 towards Big Bear because of the great views. We drove a few miles, but it got steep & windy, with fast drivers on our tail (55 mph road felt too fast), so we turned around. We also didn't want to drive down the mountain in the dark. Arrived at Whitewater Rest area on Hwy about 4:30, 57°.

Debbie Sinick isn't feeling well so we won't visit them as planned tomorrow. Instead we'll drive up to Joshua Tree. Grant has had intestinal distress since yesterday.

Wed Jan 5

46° at 6 am, light at 6:30. Drive north to 29 Palms to Joshua Tree Ntl. Pk. Grant said Joshua trees look like their tips are sparklers. In future, enter at west entrance in town of Joshua Tree. Lines might be longer but you drive thru the prettiest part of the park without having to backtrack. We entered in 29 Palms and had to backtrack.

Hiked the Skull Rock loop trail. 1.7 miles, 1:40 minutes (incl. 10 minute stop for Grant to recover from low blood

# Joshua Tree / Salton Sea

13

sugar. It's a beautiful easy hike, but popular. A lot of people in the park today, but the ranger said last week (between Xmas and New Year's) was "a madhouse." 60° with a cold wind.

Lunch at Ryan mt. trailhead. Lovely spot but trail is steep stairs. It's about 45 miles from north to south in the park. Stopped at Cottonwood Visitor Center for a brochure (avoiding the indoor crowds), then drove south over the top of the I-10 on Box Canyon Road to Mecca. Beautiful blue highway shortcut with almost no traffic.

Drove into the enclave of Bombay Beach on the east side of the Salton Sea.

I thought there was an RV park there that my friend Lisa liked, but the town was almost completely derelict, with many abandoned trailer homes, and yards piled with garbage. I can't imagine how desperate you'd have to be to live here. Turns out ~~Lisa~~ stays at Fountain of Youth Spa Resort just south of the lake in Niland. \$30 a night for dry camping.

Many sheep grazing the alfalfa fields around Calipatria.

Arrive at Winterhaven rest area on I-8 around 3:30, to scope it out. Then to Los Algodones Road to scope out that scene. \$15 a night to park in the gravel hill lots. Drove across to north side of I-8, where parking appears to be free, but the denizens

14

look a bit shady. Piles of garbage and two pit bulls. Back to rest area about 4:30. 70° high today. Rest area has no running water.

Thurs Jan 6

Quiet night. Up at 5:30. 50°. Drive away at 6:50, park at border at 7:10. \$6 day parking. Walk into Algodones. At first it seemed quieter than usual (we arrived about 8:45) but it quickly got busy. I got xrays and an exam — \$60 and everything looked good. Grant got a CT scan for his implant — a shuttle car picked him up & brought him back to <sup>Dr</sup> Salinas.

About 10:30 we walked down to the park & got lunch at Taqueria Los Poblanos near the park. Grant loved his torta al pastor & my cheese quesadilla was yummy. We sat at plastic tables in their covered courtyard, me in the sun, Grant in the shade, surrounded by locals. We liked the ambience, and it felt great to be in Mexico. We sat for a while in the park & people watched. Haitian immigrants are living in the park kiosk. The air was filled with the smells of mesquite charcoal & grilling meat.

Back to Dr. Salinas (Dr. Deni) at 11:45. Grant's implant was done at 1. Pharmacy for amoxicillin & ibuprofen, then into line. It was the longest line we'd ever seen.

It took 1.5 hours to get thru immigration. Most people weren't wearing masks & were standing close together. We were able to distance from the people ahead of us, and the people behind us gave us some space. So many vendors! I bought a large nut ~~cake~~<sup>brittle</sup> for \$2. 68°, very warm in the sun, thankfully a nice breeze. On the road about 3.

Grant wasn't feeling great due to mouth pain, so I drove. Got gas & ice, stopped around 6 for tuna & egg salad sandwiches, braved high-speed Phoenix traffic in the dark, stopped at Fry's for cottage cheese for Grant, (soft foods for two days), and got to mom's at 7:30. By 9 we were zombies.

Fri Jan 7

Showers, laundry, long walk with mom, make hummingbird food, Kelly Rob Lewi arrive about 3:30. Dinner at Mark's with Denise. His new house is great, he has grand plans for remodeling and repairs. Hot tub with Lewi. Out to van at 9:00. Warm & sunny day, about 74°.

Sat Jan 10

Long walk, replace van shelf brackets, Grant took mom's van for oil change,

## Scottsdale

16

visit with Kelly, loud & crummy dinner at Zippy's Sports Bar. So nervous about Covid, shouldn't have gone. No masks anywhere. This family reunion was a bad idea. Don't know what we were thinking. Kelly et al could have gotten it on a plane, all of us are visiting other people or going out to places where we could get exposed and then expose the rest of us. I understand that people are tired of having to live life on hold, but I really don't want to get covid. I'd probably be OK, but would mom? Would Grant?

Mom is mean. There, I've said it. I walk on eggshells trying to avoid her mean barbs. I'm really sick of it. I'm trying to cut her some slack because she's a recent widow, but it's hard.

We all watched "Don't Look Up" and I thought it was great, except I didn't like that they made the president a woman. I don't like to see negative stereotypes of woman presidents portrayed. When I expressed this sentiment, mom told me I was being ridiculous. Escape to Van at 9.

Sunday Jan 9

Walk west on mt. View. Chilly morning. Mom, Kelly, Rob, & Levi went to Seahawks

game (they won). Grant & I went to Mark's after lunch. Walked around Old Town Scottsdale (loved the mission, metal sculptures, grounds around museum) and along the "waterfront" canal (loved the ambiance & the Soleri bridge & bell).

While Grant watched the game at mom's, I did a \$100 shopping trip at Fry's for various non-perishable trip supplies.

Mon Jan 10

Walk with mom. Reorganize van storage, glue table edges. Goodbye to Rob & Lewi. Take death certificate to condo title company. Mark to dinner for mom's chicken casserole. Watch Carole King & James Taylor Troubadour documentary.

Tues Jan 11

Walk waterfront trail with mom & Kelly. Nice condos north of Soleri bridge. Kelly out with old friends. Mark for dinner. Chicken casserole with brussels sprouts.

Wed Jan 12

45° this morning, high 70°. Walk to Fry's Marketplace with Grant, 1.4 miles each way. Stocked up on a few perishables. Mark picked me up at

# Organ Pipe

18

3:30 and we hiked the Gateway Loop trail, about 4.5 miles. So beautiful out in the desert, and a nice sunset. Pulled pork sandwiches at mom's. My total today was 8.5 miles!

Thurs Jan 13

43° 6 am. Shower, breakfast, sad goodbye mom (goodbye to sad mom). Gas up and on the road at 8:40. 101 south to 238 and 85 south to Ajo. Park at the main plaza and walk around the town to see charming houses, churches, and a restored old school. A group exercising in the park, probably winter residents (Ajo has many). Lunch, then drive 40 minutes to Alamo campground in Organ Pipe Cactus Ntl. Mon. The campground only has four non-reservable sites, but to our delight three were open. It's beautiful here, densely forested with saguaro & organ pipe cactus. There were a few hikers but they've left & we have the place to ourselves except for the one other guy who's camping. Toasty in the sun, a perfect low-70s in the shade, light breeze, so quiet. \$6 a night with our pass. Settled in about 1:30.

Grant napped, I did tai chi, played guitar, journalized, read, walked.

Bear & cheese quesadillas with avocado, sour cream, salsa. The rocky hills glowed orange in the sunset. A  $\frac{3}{4}$  moon. A solar-powered blue light flashing nearby - some kind of rescue station for border crossers? Chilly wind came up at sunset, then died. Comfortable  $65^{\circ}$  at 7 pm. A few tiny non-biting insects attracted to our dinner. Leaving hood open to deter packrats. So quiet out here. Waiting for stars.

This afternoon fighter jets flew overhead, two of them circling with a deafening roar. The moon is bright, the saguaro shapes silhouetted. Clouds & moonlight blocking most of the stars. Neighbor said there's BLM boondocking at milepost 55.

Friday Jan 14

Up at 7. Neighbor gone, never heard a thing.  $55^{\circ}$  in van,  $48^{\circ}$  outside. No breeze, feels very comfortable. So quiet! Pink dawn, mountains to the west glowing pink. Sun came up over the hill above the campground at 8:15.

Grant slept until 8:30. He's crabby because he says I was stealing the covers.

Hike Alamo Canyon trail. 1.8 mi round trip, about 75 minutes. Lots of scat (coyote?), many small lizards scurrying across trail, cactus wren, white tailed jackrabbit with tall ears swiveling like dish antennas. Spines on organ pipe glowing orange like an awa in sunlight, backlit. Tips of saguaro arms have white spine swirls, look like green & white peppermint candies.

# Mexico

20

Nice trail. First part smooth & wide, an old road leading to a roofless adobe brick house. Second part rockier, with dense shrubs indicating water. Ends at abandoned corral. Cloudy &  $67^{\circ}$ .

Drive to visitor's center, 10 miles south. Signal + wifi here so we caught up on email, text, Facebook. Then drove 21-mile Ajo Mountain Loop road. Part dirt, part paved, one way, not too many vehicles. Borrowed a paper guide with info for 18 numbered stops. Learned a lot about the area. Beautiful drive. Picnic at stop #6.  $72^{\circ}$

Back to VC for wifi & walked nature trail. Arrive campground 3 pm. One tent here, no cars. Very sleepy from driving. Loud low rumble of fighter jets.

Today we also drove to Lukeville to scope out the crossing. Gas station there has reasonable gas prices ( $\$3.79$ ).

Breezy, overcast,  $67^{\circ}$  at 3 pm. Campground full by 4 pm. Same dinner as last night. (Bean & cheese quesadillas.) Owl hooting, lots of stars. Strong winds shook the van in the night.

Saturday Jan. 15

Up at 6,  $55^{\circ}$ . Leave camp at 6:40. Stop for gas at the border. Cross at 7:15. Had to ask where to get the tourist

visa - totally hidden, tiny little office with no one else there. No parking area, just a few spots on the street. That was after they <sup>borders folks</sup> pulled us aside for an inspection of the van interior. Don't know what they were looking for, and they didn't ~~ask~~ <sup>ask</sup> any questions or open the cooler. The Visa office squirted hand sanitizer on our hands when we walked in.

We drove about 15 miles to the customs office in San Emeterio. ~~First~~ Very confusing, you actually park in the travel lane, against the curb, and go inside the Aduana office. First I went to the Banjercito window, where three women and one guy took my paperwork, came out to the van to photograph the door decal with the weight info, entered data into a computer, and conferred among themselves. At last they told me I would need pre-authorization from the customs agent across the hall. I waited quite a while for a woman to finish something on the computer, then she went to find the customs guy. He came out to the van, looked at the sticker, and shook his head, explaining that there was no way he could make an exception for an overweight cargo van. That was after he scrutinized the registration and double checked the rules in his book. He said that although the book says the weight is "cargo capacity," they ~~interpret~~ actually mean the gross vehicle weight rating. We were disappointed but not surprised. We decided to drive to Nogales anyway, even though we doubted we'd have any better luck.

## TIP

22

It took almost 4 hours to get there, via hiway 2 + 15. First we went to the Banjercito at Km 21. The ~~nice~~ friendly young woman took all my papers, marked them up, double checked everything, entered data in her computer. I was getting hopeful. Then she uttered the dreaded words, "It exceeds the weight limit." She said I'd need to go the Aduana to get pre-approval. I said I'd already tried that in Lukeville + it didn't work. She said, "Oh no, they'll give it to you." She handed me a paper with a spot for the Aduana stamp and pointed me to the adjacent Aduana office. But it was closed.

I went into the Visa office and she told me I'd need to go back to the customs office at the border.

To get to the Km 21 offices we'd had to drive north past the new jersey barriers blocking the center of the road and make a U-turn. To head north again we had to drive south + make a U-turn.

When we got to the border the lanes were poorly marked and we ended up in the truck lane. A truck pulled up behind us and honked. He got out, came up to our window, and said we'd have to back out, past the line of trucks.

It was nervewracking and seemed to take forever. We found the completely unmarked parking lot with a cone in the entrance, which we ignored. The Aduana building was locked. A guy pointed me across the street, where all the trucks and cars were crossing the border. It sure didn't look like you were allowed to cross there, but he pointed to the crosswalk. The Aduana was in an ~~unmarked~~ window. I had to ask the people in line if it was the Aduana.

While I was waiting an official saw my paperwork & said I had to go to customs at Km 21. He said the woman working the border Aduana window wouldn't have a stamp. I explained that the Aduana at Km 21 had been closed & they'd sent me back to the border. He didn't believe it & called Km 21. A woman answered and said they <sup>Aduana was now</sup> ~~were~~ open. I dreaded driving back there if it was a wild goose chase. Then he said I might as well try here first, at the border office.

The Aduana said I'd need to get the van inspected & she called over the same guy. I explained that the van was across the street. He asked me to point it out. "The one with the fan on top? ~~Is it~~ Is it a motorhome?" I said yes, and he didn't even ~~look~~ <sup>inspect</sup> at it. A short while later the Aduana handed me stamped paperwork! Back to Banjercito at Km 21, where the same nice woman busily processed

## TIP

24

reams of paperwork, charged me \$400+ dollars (mostly a deposit) and handed me a permit! (No more window decals, now they're just paper.) At 2 pm we were finally heading south. It was incredibly helpful to be able to speak Spanish!

Back to Lukeville: It took 90 minutes at the border, and it was 8:45 before we left. It was 230 km on hiway 2 to Santa Ana on a good one + two lane road. One \$6 toll booth. There were quite a few semis on the first leg. A few gas stations & hotels, lots of "rest area" pullouts.

Lunch next to a park on the main road in ~~Santa Ana~~. Imuris on hiway 15 north of Santa Ana. One ~~toll~~ toll booth \$1.50.

Coming back<sup>south</sup> through a town we missed seeing a tope — too busy deciphering road signs — and hit it a little fast, sending all our gear up and down with disconcerting crashing noises. We both hit the roof so to speak. I swore, Grant got mad at me. (I didn't swear at him, just at the fear of the potential damage to the van & our stuff.) The tope was completely unmarked. Grant also got quite mad & yelled at me during the truck lane backing up incident because I was scared and kept telling him what to do. (I thought he was trying to turn around, but he was just trying to get clear)

of the truck behind us.)

No rest areas on 15. We stopped at a 24-hour Pemex about 45 miles north of Hermosillo.<sup>carbó</sup> The gas pumper said no problem to spend the night out back with the trucks. Stopped at 4:20 to avoid any night driving. We're both exhausted. I drove the last 45 minutes or so. There's a National Guard truck parked near us & it appears to be staying the night, which is quite reassuring. 74° at 5 pm.

Cooked quesadillas inside. Grant crashed early. Crickets chirping. Nice breeze with side window & fan vent open.

Lukerville vs Nogales: Lukerville FMM is less crowded, but there's a \$6 toll. Nogales only \$1.50 toll. Otherwise about the same.

Slept great. Quiet & felt safe.

Sunday Jan 16

Up at 5, on the road by 7, at first light. 57° This Pemex is in the town of Carbó. Nice clean restrooms with soap & paper. 5 pesos. South on 15. 93¢ toll before Hermosillo bypass. Roads in great condition. They just keep getting better every time we come down here. More tolls today:  $120 + 39 + 76 = 328$  ¢ = \$16.

Light traffic, few towns, cows grazing in the highway median. Only one short stretch of bad road, through a small town. Wonderful bypasses

around Hermosillo and Ciudad Obregon.

Brief stop at Deer Dancer statue. Bad light for pictures. Lots of vendors by road. Parking area rundown & littered.

Another 193 p toll, bringing today's total to \$26. Lots of pitahaya growing along the road.

Stop at Ley Supermercado in Navojoa, lunch along Alamos road, arrive at campground about 1 pm. 84°. Sky, Bobbi, & Mary here, along with Sky's cousin Diane & her husband Drew. A shower felt wonderful!

Social flycatchers and magpie jays eating tree fruits above us. The flycatchers look just like great kiskadees. They chatter loudly.

Spent the afternoon setting up camp, chatting with Mary, reading. Cool breeze in the shade kept it comfortable. Grant walked into town in the heat, returning an hour later without sunstroke, to my great relief. Potatoes & eggs for dinner.

Another camper, an older guy named Eddie, spent the afternoon loudly talking on the phone - bellowing. Probably hard of hearing. He is in a lot of pain from rheumatoid arthritis and says he is leaving tomorrow to head north for treatment. He also talks loudly to himself, swearing & grunting. Quite a character. ~~At the~~

At the far end of the 16-spot campground is late 70's Earl & his wife in their big 5<sup>th</sup> wheel. He came over to ask if we'd stayed here before and answer any questions we had. They've been coming since 2006. Sky & Bobbi have one dog and Diane & Drew have two, plus there are another four or so campground dogs, so it's quite a menagerie. They are mostly quiet and well-behaved.

Grant said he was getting bit, although I never saw any bugs. We put up the mosquito screen but it needs more magnets across the top. It was still warm when we went to bed so we left the door open. Then we were blasted awake by loud music and a bass beat that felt like I was inside a kick drum. We closed all the doors & windows, and I moved my head to the foot of the bed, away from the back doors. Although I could still feel the thumping, it was much reduced and I was finally able to sleep.

I'm curious what effect covid has had on the town. Mary said it's much quieter, and many things are closed. There is no one staying at the B&B here at the campground. Earl said he didn't see any changes.

Doves cooing and cicadas chirping loudly.

# Alamos

28

Mon Jan 17

Up at 7, 54°, quickly warming as the sun hits our camp. I like our spot on the south side because it gets morning sun & afternoon shade.

A flock of adorable green parrotlets flew into the tree above our site and spent about 20 minutes gorging on fruits. They are the exact same color as the leaves and very hard to see.

About 10:30 we walked into town. We found the easy vehicle route to the Campground! Turn left at the first street after the Dolisa Hotel, just before entering the town of Alamos.

A sign says "Carlos y Mariscos Konup." When you get to the arroyo, turn right and follow it to the cemetery.\*

Almost everyone in town is wearing masks, even outside. A truck drove around telling people about an upcoming vaccination clinic, Astrazeneca vaccine.

Fish tacos for lunch. So yummy. One isn't quite enough food for me, but two would be too much fried food. One is two soft small corn tortillas, 3 small pieces of breaded fried fish, and one onion ring. Condiments include avocado sauce, salsas, cuke,

\* We knew it was the right route when we saw Mr. & Mrs. East drive by with their big rig.

tomato. I can't eat any of them, but ~~they~~ the tacos are delicious plain. \$1.50 each (30¢). Grabbed a bag of ice at the abarrotes closest to the market. Before that we bought cabbage, carrot, squash, beans, & bananas from a friendly vendor in the market. Back to camp at 12:40, 81°. New camper named Gina arrived.

Cooking table was covered in tree debris, so we set up the canopy and cleared off the stove & table. Washed socks & underwear & hung up a clothesline. Organized van, swapped out heavy quilt.

Sky, Bobbi, Mary, & Diane got back from La Aduana around 3.

Good cell signal here at the campground. Delish dinner: stir-fried cabbage, carrot, onion, zucchini, green beans with a brown rice - quinoa ready rice packet my mom got at Costco. Music with Bobbi. Fun harmonies with her soprano voice. Breezy.

Tues Jan 18

55° at 6 am. Pink clouds & full moon. 9 am left with Diane, Sky, & their three dogs to hike at La Aduana. Such a charming old town. Parked in front of the store in the main square and walked up the arroyo, through a gate, and farther up the arroyo. When it ends there's a trail on the left. The trail is

## Things to do in Alamos

30

good all the way up to an enormous pair of sprawling figs that are great for birding. Saw elegant trogon, squirrel cuckoo, magpie jays (in the arroyo), black & white warbler, tufted flycatcher, brown-crested flycatcher, painted redstart, & a coati.

Ladders, backets, woodpeckers  
Magnificent tree cactus called hetcho, or etcho, grow among fig & other deciduous trees. It's a great hike. We continued on past the figs, but the trail got steep & rocky. Back to camp at 1:30, so a bit over 4 hours door-to-door.

Grant had a nice morning walking into town & had shrimp tacos for lunch.

A few jejenes (no see-ums) biting in camp.

Met a nice guy who is building a house in town. Friends of his arrive at the campground tomorrow & he was scoping things out. ~~This man is from San Jose.~~

Things to do in Alamos: Pedregal birds & trails, mirador, La Aduana town & trail, walk to Panaderia Alba bakery, go out to eat, music festival, explore neighborhoods on foot, cemetery, Hotel de los Santos, bookstore, trail behind camp, house tours thru bookstore, indigenous villages.\*

Bobbi got out her keyboard & we played music. Later we all had cake they'd bought at a local bakery. Pretty edible, not too sweet.

\* Bird garden lady (across from cemetery, to left of big white house), Reynas cafe, Sunday market, Kathy's gallery at Tacubaya #15.

Wed Jan 19

Tape Grant's heel blister & go for an easy walk to the cemetery & down the arroyo to see the giant retaining wall being built out of huge tires. The property is owned by a guy named Dan. During a big flood some years ago a chunk of his property eroded away.

There is an enormous estate home across from the cemetery. A man at the cemetery told me it was owned by Alamos folks but used for weddings and events. He said that years ago a wealthy ranching family owned the property. Their daughter fell in love with the gardener. The father killed the gardener. The daughter hanged herself. Her ghost is sometimes seen walking between the house & the cemetery.

At the cemetery I also met an American couple named Gene & Deborah who have lived here for 11 years full time. They feed and care for the street dogs with an organization called Dogs of Alamos. They said that people vaccines were late in arriving here, and there was a lot of misinformation. The first vaccine was from China, with low effectiveness. Now it's Astrazeneca. They guess the vaccine rate is about 50%. People have only recently started masking.

## Alamos

32

Grant's blister is really bad and he can't walk. I walked into town with Sky, Bobbi, & Mary. Bobbi has a bad knee and it hurts to walk. One of the camp dogs followed us and Bobbi decided to take the dog back. Sky, Mary, & I walked to Hacienda de los Santos resort & spa to see the gorgeous grounds, with fountains, spa, restaurant, and seating areas. They showed me the bookstore, open til 3, with books in Spanish and English, and seating areas. I love the streets on the south side of town, with the beautifully restored gringo facades.

We popped into one cute restaurant on Calle Obregón but prices were high. They do sell ice cream at a cafe in front.

The interior patio oozed ambiance; three large guitar player statues stood around the fountain.

We walked to Alameda Plaza to get tacos, but everyone was closed, so we slogged back to Doña Lola's, ready to rest. Tasty tostadas with chicken, served with spicy chicken broth on the side. 80 pesos for ~~the~~ 3 tostadas - I could only eat half.

81°. Got back to camp about 2. Grant was hot, bit up, heel sore, and one of his insulin sites failed. He was not having a good day.

Gina left this morning, to everyone's relief, as she was not vaccinated. Diane & Drew left for NaJopatia.

Talked a little bit with Maria, the owner of Rancho Acosta. Actually it's her husband, Carlos' family ranch. She said they get very few campers, and only around the music festival. They're adding new facilities so they can host weddings.

Quite a few mosquitoes today...

Sky said they were here one year in a big rain and the streets flooded. It made him realize why the sidewalks here are so tall.

Two big travel trailer rigs pulled in today. They used to stay at the Dolisa RV park but it is now closed.

Chilly evening, no music or cake! Breezy, kept the bugs down.

Grant bought carnitas for dinner from a stand on Alameda Plaza.

Thurs Jan 20

50° at 6:30. Mario is maintenance guy, very friendly. He told me "serucho" is a saw and "sierra" is a big saw. The guy we met the other day, who's building a house in town, and whose friends rolled in yesterday, is named Craig. They call him Smiley. He was a well driller.

Walk to El Pedregal about 10. 4.5 miles round trip. Lovely walk there on quiet streets along the Arroyo Agua Escondida, then down a

dirt road lined with large gated properties. One sign said "Rancho Not Very Grande, Poco a Poco construction." not a lot of birds at the Pedregal feeders. Some fresh oranges & hummingbird food, but no seeds. Heard magpie jays, saw a cardinal, black-vented oriole, violet-crowned hummie, gila woodpecker, house finch (m+f), possible lazuli bunting (female or non-breeding male).

Took the long way back through town to Farma pronto by the gas station to look for moleskin, no luck.

Back to camp about noon. Leftover carnitas and cheese quesadillas. Now sitting on the terrace by the pool, which feels cooler & less buggy than sitting by the van in the shade. 75°, light breeze. Workers are busy building the new restroom/office. Others are cleaning and doing other maintenance. The fountain is making cooling noises.

Smiley said roofs here have seven layers. Wood beams are now made of concrete instead. Then rectangular blocks, followed by some combination of adobe, visqueen, & brick. He says the visqueen lasts forever because it isn't exposed to UV.

Broke out our propane firepit and had a lovely evening chatting with Sky, Bobbi, & Mary.

Note: Don't park under fruiting tree in Alamos - bird poop + fruit splats! \*

Friday Jan 21

52° at 7 am. Workers here start early. The two women sweep & mop the patio every day, and clean the bathrooms.

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\* Sonoran hot dogs for dinner at Hot Dogs Balta in Alameda square. Delicious. Fresh soft bun, beef dog, crunchy bacon chunks, grilled onion, choice of raw onion, tomato, mayo, mustard, queso cotilla, & avocado sauce, and more. 30 pesos each. You sit on a park bench to eat them. messy! A cute little boy stood on the bench and inched his way closer to Grant before swatting his arm & giggling with glee. I pretended to try to tickle him & he laughed adorably.

One big stage being set up on Alameda, and the main stage squeezed into residential Comercio Street instead of in Plaza Alamos. Walked 6.5 miles today.

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The five of us walked the trail behind the buildings to a spring, about a mile each way. Just behind the hotel there is a big shed being used to store core samples from

## Alamos

36

a silver mining company called Minaurum. One of the owners, David Jones, was an old beau of Mary Zuschlag's, and died suddenly a few weeks ago.

We went through a gate and followed the easy trail through scrub forest to the spring. It's used by cows - we could hear the muted clangs of their bells - so is smelly & brown.

Then we all walked (Sky, Bobbi, & Mary biked) to Teresita's restaurant. They love it but it's a bit too fancy for us.

I had the Croque Monsieur, which was delicious, with thick buttery crusty bread, mushrooms, caramelized onions, & a flavorful mix of cheeses. Bobbi ate 1/4 and I was stuffed after eating the rest. Grant had a burro la colorada, but said it had too much potato. The jamaica was delicious. 400 p total with tip (\$20). Nice patio and a big walled garden area with a view of the mountains.

Stopped for veggies, chicken, and tortillas on the way back to camp. 4.2 miles total. (On the way <sup>to east</sup> we took Del Volantin and Nikos Heres, a steep cobble hill with a few menacing dogs. Shorter but harder.)

Grant's blister is a mess, but he's able to walk. Stomach distress when we returned, so he's sleeping. 79° at 2:30. I moved the van to the next

## Alamos

site so we don't keep getting bombarded [37] by bird poop.

Interesting to watch the construction of the new building and how they pour the pillars and beams onsite.

Met Maria's daughter melissa, who is living here. She has two brothers.

Sautéed chicken breast, vegetables, and Ready Rice for dinner. Soak & bandage Grant's foot. Sam from Bisbee arrived, as well as another couple in a big rig, Barbara, Bill, & their friend John, all from Bisbee.

Mike Foster may not be able to come. He forgot to turn in his ~~TIP~~ the last time he came down & they wouldn't give him a new one.

Got a close-up look at anapa flowers, which are large clusters of tubular pink ~~flowers~~ flowers. Learned that alamos means poplars, and the town is named for the poplars that grow here, though I'm not sure what they look like.

Sat Jan 22

52° at 7 am. Took the stairs up to the Mirador. About one hour round trip. Short walk up the arroyo agua escondida to the stairs. Morning is the best time for photos because the sun is behind you when you look toward town. Also the stairs are in shade. Very windy today.

Bobbi slipped on the trail to the springs and broke her wrist! A doctor came to camp, wrapped it, and sent her to the clinic in

Navajoa for xrays. He charged 500 p  
(\$25).

Grant was able to walk to town wearing one flip flop with a sock and one boot. No craft vendors. He got carne asada from the vendor on the corner and didn't really like it. <sup>tough meat</sup> I got a shrimp taco with extra onions. I walked to paraderia Alba for telera buns and a cinnamon roll. Grant waited in the square and watched a guy prepping onions & tomatoes. A trio was doing a sound check on the stage and sounded great. May go watch them later. Huasteca music.

Back at camp for showers, chat with Mary, Sam, John. Sky & Bobbi took their camper to San Jose hospital. Half of our leftovers for dinner, delicious wrapped in local flour tortillas, thin like mushu pancakes. Half a small cabbage, two carrots, small zucchini, one onion, and a large chicken breast made enough for three meals.

I walked to town about 6:30 to hear the Huasteca band. There weren't a ton of people & it was easy to distance. Many people dining in restaurants, the outdoor patios lit by enormous old-style chandeliers. Not very many vendors. The music was fun, but nowhere to sit. It also gets a bit repetitive. Back to camp at 8, 61°. Walked 7.5 miles today.

Sun Jan 23

39

52° at 7:30. Talk for a long time on patio with Terry & John. Terry has lived in Alamos & owned a restaurant and properties. He has many stories to tell & is a real yakker. He knows a lot about this area.

Bobbi has multiple wrist fractures & will have surgery today.

Grant, Mary, and I walked to the Sunday market. Fruits, vegetables, tacos, clothes, tools, sweets, toys. Some veggies you can't get in town, like bell peppers, fresh figs, watermelon. We bought a small watermelon & put it in the cooler to chill. Vendor selling strawberries & cream, called out "Children, start crying now!"

Walked to Alamos plaza and found the Huichol bead makers set up. They gave us a small flyer in English with info about them & their work. He is a great salesman, and when he showed us the iridescent beaded mask tanquards <sup>holders</sup> we couldn't resist. \$5 each. The beads (chaquiras)

Rosendo Carrillo de la Rosa and his wife,  
Celia from Santa Catarina, Jalisco

They are of the Huichols, an indigenous people living in the Sierra Madre Occidental range in the Mexican states of Jalisco and Nayarit. They are best known to the larger world as the Huichol, however, they refer to themselves as Wixáritari ("the people") in their native language, Wixárika.

The Huichol have a long history of beading, making the beads from clay, shells, corals, and seeds using them to make jewelry and to decorate bowls and other items. The "modern" beadwork usually consists of masks and wood sculptures covered in small, brightly colored commercial beads (CHAQUIRAS) fastened with wax and resin. They have been using these colorful Charquiras for the last 200 plus years.

Huichol patterns and designs have religious and cultural significance and many are influenced by visions which occur during sacred peyote ceremonies. Plant and animal motifs remain the most common and retain their original meaning.

are made in Czech Republic, bought in Guadalajara.

Pellizcadas (thick corn tortillas with a rim, also called sopes or gorditas) for lunch, with beans, cheese, carne asada, and avocado salsa for lunch. 60¢ each (\$3).

Windy today, 73° at 2 pm. Guitar, tai chi, putter, chat. Leftovers for dinner. The watermelon we bought was an unripe dud. Bob Rink came by looking for sky and Bobbie. We met him two years ago with his sisters Kathy & Ann. Photographer. Walked to Alameda after dinner.

Didn't like the abstract jazz. No cheese & caramel pies. Lots more people out tonight, probably because it's Sunday.

Sat on a bench in the plaza and watched people strolling by. Looked up to see palm trees & stars.

Small bright green frogs on campground porch today, like shiny lumps of wax. So cute.

At the market we saw knobbly black fruits called papache. Sweet & bitter, they look like spiky grenades. I learned that peanut brittle is called peitoria (and also palanqueta), and that excellent peanuts are grown near here. I also learned that Alamos and Scottsdale are sister cities.

Monday Jan 24

41

48° at 7 am. Nice chat with Terry, who has had a very interesting life as a boat & house builder, and has lived in San Fran, Port Townsend, all before they gentrified. He's lived in Alamos for the past 8 years but recently sold his house here.

Quesadillas for lunch then walk to town. Cooler today, high 75. I walked to Kathy's house & gallery at Tacubaya #15. Grant went to the ATM & bought chicken for dinner. Kathy's house is in transition while they're building a casita in the back & converting most of the house to a gallery of local artists. On the way back I went into the Los Santos chapel to see the painted cement vigas (roof beams) that look like wood. A singer and piano player were warming up for an afternoon concert so I got a private performance.

Bobbi & Sky got back about 3. She is in good spirits & had tales to tell about great medical care & upbeat Mexican music in the OR.

The chicken (from the white "Pollo" building next to Arroyo Aduana) came with coleslaw, macaroni salad (both pretty good), corn tortillas (got soggy), salsa (way too spicy), and the chicken was delicious. Shared with Sam. Bobbi, Sky, & Mary joined us around a farewell fire til 9. Sam regaled us with stories of being a GI in Italy in the 60s. Such a busy day I didn't have time for guitar or shower.

Noticed today that the "bird lady" house across from the partheon is for sale.

Rancho Acosta was \$15 a night, stay a week get one night free. \$18 for big rigs, less if no electricity.

Mary & I walked up to the Alameda stage before dinner to see the Indigenous dancing but it was disappointing. Some adorable indigenous 10-year-old-ish boys stomped to repetitive music (harp + ??) for about 10 minutes, wearing moth cocoon leg rattles. Then two large women & 4 girls, wearing regular dresses (no regalia) held hands & walked in a circle while a man shook a ~~gourd~~ & chanted in the Guarijío language. Then a 4-piece band came out but the singer was sick & the poor guy who ~~cantin'~~ had to fill in couldn't hold a tune... (Bob Link story: left phone in bus station, called, they put it on the next bus for him!)

Tues Jan 25

45° at 6:30 am. Awake at 5:15. Took us about an hour to pack up canopy & van, scrape bird poop off windshield. Stop for gas on the way out of town. Light enough to drive by 6:30.

Stop at Soriana just south of Navojoa. Although ~~they~~ they have housewares,

# Villa Celeste, Celestino Gasca

43

their food selection is not as good as Ley. And they didn't have big bandaids, only small. Their bread selection was white only. On the road at 8:30.

The road got bad for a short distance at the state line (Sinaloa). A friendly guy asked to see our car permit (TIP) at a checkpoint. I pulled the paperwork envelope out of the door pocket and before I even pulled out the TIP he smiled and waved us on, wishing us a good day.

The highway in Sinaloa is worse than Sonora. Abrupt bridge approaches + bumpy pothole repairs.

High tolls today: 558 p total (\$28). The toll booth people are very friendly. The road got better after Culiacan. Few cars on the road. Lush fields of corn + other crops.

Arrived Villa Celeste 3 pm. 78° and breezy. Glad we made reservations, as just after we pulled in the remaining two spots down below filled up. A caravan of ~~2~~ Road Treks<sup>+10 big rigs</sup> pulled in. Most are parked up top. Gina is here with her yappy dog + there's another yappy dog, plus a couple of the Road Trekkers have little dogs.

The power at the site next to ours has reverse polarity, so they can't use it (the importance of testing!). We felt bad not offering to let them use ours, thinking we might need our fan (we didn't). They had to run their generator for a while in the evening, but it was quiet. This morning I see that their cord probably won't reach our pole, but I'll offer.

Beautiful sunset. Leftover chicken, macaroni salad, & coleslaw for dinner. The coleslaw was good with a little extra mayo.

Grant had stomach issues in the night.

Wed Jan 26

55° at 6:30 but feels warmer. Very light dew. Idyllic. While Grant tried to sleep more, I walked on the beach and did tai chi by the ocean! Pelicans skimming the waves in formation, frigate birds floating, shorebirds dashing & probing, gentle waves serenading, ~~shrimp~~<sup>fishing boats</sup> trawlers like mirages on the horizon, a train rumbling through town, almost no one else on the beach. The breeze starts about 9 am.

Noé, the owner has made the palapa ~~seating~~<sup>area</sup> nicer, ~~the~~ with more seating & some cushions. The beachfront lots look just a bit more developed.

There is a turtle sanctuary nearby, but releases finish by the end of Dec.

Gina smokes & drinks & isn't vaccinated, so I'm being polite but avoiding her.

The pelicans patrol back and forth, flapping & gliding in unison, like follow the leader. Another beach walk with Grant.

## Villa Celeste

His blister is mostly gone.

45

Godfrey cabbage, carrot sticks, tostadas, cheese, chicken, olives for lunch. Chatted with neighbors Lena & Ron, from Salt Lake City. In their 70s, environmental consultants, intrepid world travelers, very nice.

Guitar and read after lunch. The breeze and some high clouds keeping it cool. High 72°. Walked south on the beach around the point and down to the next point. Easiest at low tide.

Saw a place called Punta San Miguel RV Park. Looks kind of fancy but isn't an overlander. Sad to see the unregulated lot development: retaining walls, cutting vegetation, bringing in fill. I wonder if there are sewage regulations.

Saw whimbrel, willet, two kinds of small shorebirds.

Back at camp the caravanners are having a potluck in the palapa, with lots of fresh oysters. Their trip leader has Covid! And was hanging out at their potluck!

Saw the oyster guys out today with their tires to pile their catch. \$5 (100p) a dozen. I never went in the water but was told it's in the low 70s this time of year.

## Mazatlan

Thurs Jan 27

55° at 6:30. I walked and did tai chi on the beach. I noticed there are solar panels on the shrimp hatchery just to the north. The tide was starting to come in, and the moist-but-drying sand felt like walking on memory foam, my shoes sinking in just a little. The beach is redecorated at each new tide, with new patterns of round stones, shells, and driftwood, the stones strewn across the sand like giant fairy dust. The sand also has gold sparkles. Villa Celeste is an oasis of coconut palms.

Back at camp Noé came by to offer a covid test. He'd contacted a health care worker to come to the camp and wanted a head count. We declined, since we hadn't spent time with the caravan folks (we'd chatted with Lena & Ron, but at a distance and outdoors).

We scrubbed off the bird poop on the van with our rag, so we'd look a bit more presentable, packed up, and left about 10:30. Gassed up at a well-hidden Femex in Estación Dimas at the turnoff for El Quelite. Overcast sky, lovely rural road with horses, a cowboy, and a tractor.

Arrived in El Quelite about noon. The town was busier than last time

we were here on a Tuesday morning. The restaurant was busy but not packed, and we got a quiet table away from any other people. A chachalaca stopped by and there were big orange iguanas on the roof.

Grant had carne asada and I had carnitas. They were very good. Tons of food. They brought chips, salsa, queso fresco, jocoque (sour cream), ~~queso~~ requesón (cottage cheese), and thick cream (nata), plus jamaica, plus dessert (piña custard, or leche con piña, and leche quemada, like burnt cream). Total 439 pesos (\$22) plus tip. We have lots of leftovers. It was fun to come back here but we don't need to return. On the way out I mentioned to one of the workers that I wanted to take some pics before leaving, and she motioned me to follow her to the back patio area, which was closed for construction (laying pavers). It had a delightful mural of a mexican streetscape, and wonderful tilework and folk art, like the rest of the restaurant. She proudly told me she had worked there for 20 years, since the restaurant opened.

Lots of vendors selling dairy products, trinkets, and horse rides. A bit warm in the sun. The town didn't feel quite as charming as the first time, but places often aren't the second time.

Road construction detour took us on another charming road, across 15D, and south to connect with it. Arrived at Paul & Trish's on the north end of Mazatlan about 2:40.

Carlos (Vantana)

## Mazatlan

48

They came down to say hi and told us to come up when we're ready. Our parking spot is quite pleasant & private, next to a little man-made stream & the tennis court.

We went up about 5, toured their gorgeous place (high end everything) and ogled the 8<sup>th</sup> floor view and the stunning crimson sunset. About 7 we drove into town for tacos at Pablos, an open air eatery with a roof. Small tacos are 36¢ each, a bit pricey, and their specialty is pastor. They had taken us there three years ago.

I was still uncomfortably full from lunch so didn't order food, just a jamaica, thinking that would settle my stomach. It was still too much. I got up about 5 times to pee, and was quite uncomfortable all night, feeling headache, dizzy, bloated, and nauseous.

Fri Jan 28

ABDOMINALS. Still not feeling great. Don't feel like putting anything in my stomach. Stiff neck & headache are probably from my sore shoulder.

Sat in the pool bar watching the ocean and pelicans for a while before driving into town to walk the north end of the malecón (waterfront promenade) and along

notes for future Mazatlán stays

## Etzatlán Jalisco

49

a saltwater estuary with lots of birds and iguanas. The malecón was sterile and noisy. I do not like Mazatlán, with its endless miles of high rise hotels and tourist restaurants. I'm feeling headachey & tired and took a nap. Then up to Paul & Trish's for chatting and laundry. Then another nap! 75° today and breezy by the water. Dinner at Henry's: 15 min wait, they bring chips & dips plus delicious bean soup. The baked potatoes are enormous (papa loca), stuffed with meat, cheese, & more. I couldn't even eat half. →

Sat Jan 29

66° at 6 am. Still feeling dizzy, nausea, and my leg is achy. Shower in the fancy bathrooms across from the owners' lounge. On the road at 7. Notes for future trips to Mazatlán: No Meson de los Laureanos, no malecón or trips to town. Arrive late on day 1 (after dinner even), spend one day hanging out at pool area and walking the trail on their street (lots of bikes though). Go out to Henry's for baked potatoes (walk there). Leave the next morning.

15 D to Etzatlán. Smoky air from burning fields north of Tepic. Passed an estuary teeming with birds, but there was no place to stop.

Total tolls today were breathtakingly high: 1132 pesos (\$57)! We drove for 5 hours, so that's about \$11 an hour... The roads were green & serene though, in great condition with light traffic.

Sugar cane fields south of Tepic are yellow green. Then pine trees as you climb up higher. Few stopping spots on the toll road (cuota).

## Etzatlan

50

Found a shady spot for a light lunch and a 30-min snooze (still feeling nauseous). Our blind spot alert now turns itself off, even after we manually enable it. Fields of blue-gray sword agave, haystack-like tepees

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from Jan 28: chatted in their condo til 9:30 and said goodbye. Hard to get them off politics, but at least we're kindred spirits. There are few of those in their HOA. Paul & Grant have lots of techie stuff to talk about. Paul is burned out as HOA president for 2 years (one month to go) and appreciated a break from that.

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made of corn stalks, a hopper chopping sugar cane, trucks piled high with cane, burning corn stubble.

Arrive at Delia's RV Park in Etzatlan about 2. No one else here. As we turned off the road at the sign, it felt like Grant was turning in front of an oncoming car. I really didn't think he saw it, and said "Watch out!" I guess I really startled him because he really yelled at me. One of those moments where I'd gladly sign divorce papers.

Delia's is sweet, with trimmed grass (hopefully not harboring mosquitoes) a clean bathroom, chickens, ducks, and quiet dogs. Bonnie is Delia's bilingual daughter. She lived in Seattle for three years as a kid.

Very friendly and welcoming. I took another long nap. Still feeling a bit woozy. 79° with a lovely breeze. Leftover potatoes for dinner but they didn't taste that good to me. Crashed early, took a meloxicam for my leg pain but it didn't help that much. Nevertheless I slept pretty well. 75 degrees felt cool with the nice breeze.

Bonnie said we were welcome to turn off the lights, which we did, and it was lovely sitting outside in the dark, and sleeping with the windows open without bright lights shining in. I didn't notice any bugs; Grant got a few bites.

Sunday Jan 30

didn't realize

~~forgot~~ we were on mountain time now, and was surprised it didn't get light until after 7. 46 degrees! Grant woke up mad at me from yesterday and wanted to be left alone to sleep. I walked around a bit, and had a nice chat with Bonnie. Her mom, Delia, was from Sonora, her dad was from north Dakota, and they met in Nogales. They lived in Guadalajara and owned a successful bar, but he got sick (cólico), so they bought this rancho (75 acres). Later they bought another place in Guayabitos that was more successful as an RV park. They kept this place for Delia's parents. They had seven kids. Now at least two of them live on the ranch, plus they've built various houses

they rent out. Bonnie says Guayabitos has become so touristy she can't stand to go there anymore. Her son lives here with her, and she also has a daughter, Samantha, who built one of the houses for rent.

After Grant woke up we talked about yesterday and ended up having a big fight. I left to go walking alone. After a bit he caught up with me. There's a really nice paved rail trail across the highway and down a block. Quite a few people walking and biking. It didn't seem that far to town, but when we got back we had walked 4½ miles.

The town has a charming zócalo and gazebo. There was a running race, "La Ruta de los mineros," so the town was lively. We went into two churches but they weren't too interesting. Hard to find town info online. Stopped for avocado, bananas, and half a cantalope that looked ripe (but wasn't, alas). Bought two ears of corn from the back of a truck for 15¢ (75 cents).

After lunch we drove 30 minutes to the Guachimontones pyramids. Fee for anyone over 60! Easy parking. The museum was in Spanish only and not that interesting. Hot walk up a steep road (200 feet in ½ km), and we were glad to have umbrellas. It was 88°! Plus the elevation at the top was almost 4500'. The pyramids are terraced mounds.

circular

Nothing spectacular, but still worth seeing. The view from up there, of a big lake, mountains, valleys, agave fields, is lovely. There was also a nice breeze and shady spots.

We're in epiphyte country. They grow on trees, power lines, and scatter the ground.

79° at 5pm, but with a strong breeze it feels chilly.



Grant has stomach cramps and my stomach still feels sore. We're wondering what we ate or drank that might have caused it. At least we're pretty sure it's not covid. My legs feel better after walking 6 miles today.

A guy named Mike is renting the casita next door, and stopped by to say hi. He's a scientist from Iowa who helps people all over the world with corn hybridization. He said covid has taught his company that they no longer need to fly people all over the world (Mike used to do two international trips per month!), they can do much of their business via Zoom. He says Mexico does not allow GMOs, and does not grow feed corn.

## To Pátzcuaro (PTZ)

54

Didn't notice any skeeters outside, but there were quite a few in the jar.

Lots of birds here, but I haven't been feeling well enough to get out the binocs.

I cooked one of the ears of corn for dinner, but it was starchy and inedible.

Mike also said that much of the corn in this area is being replaced by veggies for export.

Mon Jan 31

48° at 6 am felt comfortable. On the road 7:30. On Bonnie's recommendation we took the libre, but it was a nightmare of traffic, dodging cars, trucks, bikes, motos, pedestrians, weaving and swerving, keeping an eagle eye out for topes (we missed seeing one today, and everything on the under-bed shelf flew forward),<sup>bumpy</sup> rocks. It didn't help that the windshield was dirty and we were driving into the sun. We found a Pemex to wash our windshield, but the driving was still incredibly stressful. At one point I said I didn't think I could take 7 hours of it. Finally slow trucks, passing, ~~extra~~ being passed, pulling onto shoulder to allow cars to pass. Exhausting. Finally we decided to get on the cuota, after three hours. What a relief!

The libre (free road) is like being in one of those video games where things are coming at you at high speed and you have to swerve and dodge to avoid them.

Tolls today: 503 p (\$25), \$8 per hour ☺

The toll road was beautiful, through gorgeous scenery without town blight. Good pavement, no topes, rest areas (we pulled into one for a welcome nap). It was so nice to be able to relax and enjoy the scenery. As we climbed higher there were pine and prickly pear trees. We saw big lakes and wondered why they were brown.

Arrived at Villa Patzcuaro campground at 3 pm. 72°. 280 per night. Two other vehicles here. One is a young man from Vancouver BC named Nathan. 7000' elevation.

We got through today with minimal driving clashes, but Grant gets really tired of feeling bossed around by me. It's my fear, but to him it feels like criticism.

Mashed potatoes for dinner with butter, sour cream, and a little manchego cheese. Mosquitoes came out at 7, so time to get in the van. Dark by 7:10. 64° and dropping.

Tues Feb 1

Low of 38° this morning. Up at 6:30, light at 7. About 8:30 we walked into town. We took the route up the dirt street / path (the second

left as you are walking from the campground toward the main road) to the glorieta (round-a-bout), then Obregon to Plaza Chica.

The usual corunda lady wasn't there, but we found another one on the corner closer to the square. I got an atole de canela and we sat on a bench in the square. We'd forgotten that it's uphill to town, plus we're at 1000', so we were puffing a bit. The city (town) was busy with people going to work and school. A car drove by, a woman sitting in the trunk towing a wheelbarrow full of chicharones.

Grant's corunda had filling of rajas and queso, ~~and~~ topped with crema and salsa roja. He said it was exceptional. It was large, however, and he regretted eating the whole thing. My atole was delicious. I got a small, which was plenty.

I loved sitting in the square watching the morning life all around us, especially the indigenous women in their colorful skirts and wraps. People busy washing and sweeping sidewalks and even streets.

Walked up to the basilica, watched vendors setting up their stalls. Too early for the shops. Walked down Lazaro Cardenas (good sidewalk much of the way) to the glorieta, and then took Tampico & Puebla streets to Don Chucho's store. It's basically an import shop that sells all kinds of things not found in a typical Mexican

tienda, such as feta, tofu, couscous. We got cheese, milk, eggs, and tortillas. We got manchego again, but he gave us a sample of locally made chihuahua and it was delicious. He said it melts especially well. They also had cheddar, including Tillamook!

Got a mango from a vendor next door (a bit steep at 10p, or 50¢). It's a short walk with one steep stretch back to camp.

Back at 11, 3.7 miles total. After unloading I went up to the Farmacia Guadalajara for ice. They only had small bags.

Took a shower but the hot water ran out quickly. 72° in the shade at 2:30 with a light breeze.

There's a gringo guy sleeping in his small van in the parking lot here. License plate is "Vitesse." Is he French? Grey hair, eye patch, was soaking his foot in an ice bath.

Susan & Ken from Colorado arrived today in a big motorhome and a small car (driven separately). Cheerful and friendly, they appear to be on a grand adventure, seeing everything.

5 pm we walked to Fred & Meg's house for happy hour. They live close to the campground in an adobe house called casa Colibri. They invited another local couple, Susan & Mark. Susan is an artist and Mark owns a brewery in SMA. Mark recently fell and broke a rib, so he and Grant had that and much more to talk about. Meg and Susan and I talked about the Camino

## Pátzcuaro

58

(which Meg has walked most of) and music (both are musicians). It got chilly so we headed back about 7:30. Late dinner of crackers and cheese!

Wed Feb 2, Candelaria

37° at 7 am! Woke with a stiff neck headache again. Note to self: stretch neck before lying down. Cohetes (~~fireworks~~) started going off at first light. For candelaria?

Chatted with Nathan for a while - he is thinking of buying land in this area. Left at 11 to walk into town. Lázaro Cárdenas is definitely the easiest pedestrian route.

The Basilica was beautifully decorated with flowers, twinkling lights, and bags of blue and white cotton candy (sweets for baby Jesus). People were arriving with their dolls to be blessed. It was lovely, and reminded me just a little bit of the pine needle church in Chiapas.

El Patio restaurant, which is said to have great Tarascan soup, is closed on Wednesdays, so we headed to another restaurant on the Plaza Grande called La Surtadita. But they didn't start serving comida until 1:30 (it was noon). So we got a carrot muffin and pineapple

empanada (both delicious) from an adjacent cart to tide us over. Then we did a quick stroll through the market, noting the tables full of baby Jesus doll clothes, & some extraordinarily colorful fruit parfaits. We popped into the other big church (Parroquia del Santuario de Guadalupe) but it was nothing special inside and there was nothing happening. A man said hello in English and asked where we were from. I suspected his motives and was terse. Then he said he was Father so-and-so, and I realized he was welcoming us to his church. He said he loved to practice his English. He explained Candelaria as a celebration of light via candles, because Jesus was "the light of the world."

Finally it was 1:30 and we got our soup. It was delicious: a not-spicy tomato-bean base with slivers (ribbons) of crunchy tortilla, and melted cheese. I removed the hot chili garnish chunks. Served with bread, but the soup alone was quite filling. 79 p each for a bowl of soup (\$4).

They play a mix of light jazz, muzak, and Latin music from speakers around the Plaza Grande, giving it a very different vibe from the Plaza Chica. The Plaza Grande is more formal, quieter, and feels more upscale. It's where the fancy restaurants are, and there are few indigenous people. You could almost call the two plazas Plaza Rica and Plaza Pobre.

They were dismantling the Christmas tree on the Plaza Grande. Christmas decorations seem

to be left up for a long time in Mexico. We have seen no Old man dancers. Maybe they're only coming on weekends?

We'd been watching for peanut brittle and cocadas and hadn't seen it anywhere. I sailed right by a table on the Plaza Grande that had them, but hunter-gatherer Grant spotted them.

We walked back up to the Basilica street to the store where we bought our catrina, hoping to find a matching guy (catrín), but the ones she had were all too short. The store is called Galería de arte Mexicano El Colibri.

Then we walked a few doors down to Ivo's bakery. It was closed but he was there and sold us a loaf of multi-grain bread from yesterday's batch. He said it's good to reserve loaves ahead and he has a mailing list. 55 p (\$3.75)

We crossed the street to see if any of the Basilica vendors had one of the Peruvian alpaca wool knockoffs I'd been coveting. At the second to last stall I sailed right past one hanging above my head, but Grant spotted it! It's dark pink & fits perfectly. 380 p (\$18)

We peeked into the church to see if there was any candelaria action, but it was empty, so I'm glad we got to see it this morning.

Then back down the hill to see the

PTZ

beautiful library mural. The bookshelves were draped with plastic sheeting for Covid. <sup>61</sup>

Back to Plaza Grande for ice cream: mango, limón, nuez, and aguacate. The nuez was fabulous. Grant got a 38¢ cup and couldn't finish it. 24¢ was just right for me. After a nice rest on a bench, watching the school kids stream by, we started back to camp. Thank goodness it's downhill, because we were tired. It also stayed cool today. When we got back to camp it was 4 pm and 66 degrees. 5.7 miles today.

Grilled cheese sandwiches on Ivo's bread. Yum.

There are two types of pine trees in the campground and some tall agave plants. Cohetes going off in town.

New Qxo and Pemex next to campground. Makes it easier to get ice.

Thurs Feb 3

38° at 7. Susan and Mark stopped by to say hi and bye. Ken and Leslie joined the conversation. They seem very nice, but I can't let go of feeling they're not kindred spirits because of their big rig..

Walked to Don Chucho's for chihuahua cheese, yogurt, pepperoni for Grant. He bought a tamale to eat for lunch back at camp, and now he has terrible stomach cramps. Say goodbye