

A Sailboat Adventure in the Sea of Cortez
December 2 - December 20, 2005

Richard L. Bunn

Table of Contents

Prelude	1
Road Trip	1
San Carlos Preparations	2
Setting off on The sea of Cortez	3
Santa Rosalia Harbor	7
Back on Land	8
Greg Arrives	11
Heading Back Across The Sea of Cortez	13
Anchorage	16
Return to San Carlos	17
El Pescador	18
Heading Home	19

A Sailboat Adventure in the Sea of Cortez

December 2 - December 20, 2005

It's been a while now, a little while at least. It wasn't much in the grand scheme of things - a sailboat trip across a small body of salt water, some waves, no harm done - far worse has taken place over the last few thousand years and folks have lived to tell about it. But this is different - this happened to me, and the feelings that it produced in me, regardless of the smallness of the actual event, were (are!) some of the most intense and wonderful that I have experienced. The kind that make the colors more vivid, and make life a brilliant, explosively wonderful experience, that make things stick up out of the gray mist that constitutes a good bit of my past life at least. If anybody ever asks me "What exactly were you doing the first three weeks of December in 2005?" I will have a ready answer, at least until time and entropy take their toll on me. I want to share it with you, but not as much the events, those quickly become monotonous (although in the monotony is also part of the adventure, at least to some extent) - I want to share the feelings with you, because that is what is so special to me.

Prelude

This all started when my friends Jerry and Joni stopped by in April. Jerry built a beautiful steel sailboat with his own two hands, he and Joni finished it and have been sailing it for about 2-years, Alaska, west coast, then to the Sea of Cortez. They put the boat "on the hard" as dry-dock is called for the hurricane season and came north to visit friends, of whom I am pleased to be on the list. I was so jealous of their stories and pictures I was bleeding out the ears. I immediately bought a 15' sailboat, then a slightly larger 19' model of the same make (West Wight Potter, reputed to be very sea-worthy boats).

And to make it worse my son Greg works for Outward Bound, summer in Alaska, winter in Baja, so everything was forcing me to do this - get the boat ready for a Sea of Cortez trip, go down, meet Jerry and Joni, then sail across pick Greg up, sail back and drive home for Christmas. A perfect plan, it was on.

Road Trip

I was predictably late getting out of town on the 2nd. I'd planned to leave on the 21st of November but things had conspired to keep me in town and distracted until the 2nd. I left in a hurry, lots of things not packed properly but with the boat in pretty good shape equipment-wise.

The road-trip was pretty uneventful. The little motor, which was in the van, was leaking fuel and stinking up the cabin. While I was driving it was tolerable, however when I tried to sleep in a reststop in New Mexico it got to the point of overpowering, even worried about what would happen when I turned on the interior lights. I moved it out onto the trailer, tied it down and left it, taking a chance about it getting stolen was better than taking a chance of being incinerated.

The Arizona desert was stark, sharp peaks lying off the track of I-10 heading toward Tuscon.
Sea of Cortez Dec 2005 page

Then S. toward Nogales, but not very far. The road to Nogales is marked in kilometers, probably because so much Mexican traffic. I got into Nogales after dark, looked for a motel that Jerry had recommended, never found it. Somehow my VHF antenna got broken in half in Nogales (actually, not in half, broken right off at the mast-connection), it was hanging by wires. Bummer. I thought I should feel something but I didn't, I just unhooked the stump from the mast and tied it to the mast. Bummer. The VHF radio system, of which the antenna is a large component, was a big part of the boat equipment. It was safety equipment. I had no idea what I was going to do.

I ended up sleeping in the WalMart parking lot in a cluster of semi trailers, it seemed plenty safe. I got really cold in Nogales, I was surprised. I woke up early shivering, went into the store for some plastic bags and hit the road in the dark. I crossed into Mexico at the border but they didn't check your papers there, that happened about 12 miles S of the border, I was on Mexico I-15.

Having the correct papers was a major anxiety producer in getting ready, I hoped I had what I needed. I stopped at the check station, got my tourist permit then proceeded to get permits for the car and boat. I stood in line 30 minutes waiting my turn, then another 10 while the girl scurried around talking to folks in Spanish, all while I stewed about what was up and why was it taking so long. She finally came back said I was in the wrong place, I could go to the Sonora Only office, which I did and was out in minutes, no charges. Oh, well!

I headed down Mexico I-15. "Look out for the Topes" Jerry had said, excellent advice. They were awful, quite large speed bumps on the highway. Well marked, but if you missed the sign you would probably trash your suspension. I managed to avoid problems.

Hermosillo was the only large town I had to go through, it was nerve-wracking but no problem. Typical Mexican town, exhaust fumes, etc., but really well marked and no problem.

San Carlos Preparations

I got into San Carlos about 2 p.m. local time on Sunday, 04Dec, got directions to Marina Seca, the dry-dock where J&J had Lotus stored, and where they were getting it ready for sea, and drove out there. I found them pretty quickly, I was overjoyed to see them. A large part of the uncertainty of the trip was behind me. Pulling the boat 1500 miles into a foreign country had made my stomach hurt. Now I was here, I could feel the anxiety roll off me.

The time between the 4th when I got there and the 9th when I set off for Santa Rosalia were a whirlwind of activity. I stayed with Jerry and Joni, actually in the other bed in their efficiency apartment, J&J are super people, absolutely super. We ate together, stayed together, and they provided invaluable, repeat invaluable, advice and direction to me. Without their help I doubt I'd have made the trip at all, let alone been able to pull it off. And without them being there the whole trip, from beginning to end, would have been maybe 10 or 20 percent as enjoyable, they made the trip for me, no kidding. They are wonderful people.

I was most worried about the VHF antenna problem, Joni got me a lead on a used one, I bought

Sea of Cortez Dec 2005 page

it. She took me into Guaymas for parts, she thought I would get lost by myself. The new antenna didn't fit the mast mount, Jerry and I tried to drill it out, almost broke Jerry's arm, so I decided to try fiberglassing the broken one back together. It took two days, considering drying time, but it seemed to work, we did a radio-check and got replies, no problem. I was set. Now I was waiting on the weather.

We ate too much and drank too much Negro Modelo and laughed too much the rest of the time, being with them was a great distraction from the concerns of the trip.

I was actually more or less terrified all 4 days I was working on getting the boat ready. The relief from the anxiety of the trip down was quickly replaced with anxiety about the impending voyage. Tales of 8- to 10-foot waves, high winds, all kinds of mayhem taking place. And looking out from the overlook near Marina Real, seeing a seemingly endless sea in front of me, no end in sight, just vast ocean - my stomach balled up into a knot- what had I done to myself? Whitecaps, for as far as the eye could see. I thought about looking down from time to time to be sure there was no pool of pee around my feet, but I was sure I'd know it if there was, my feet would be warm.

I had no rational basis for making a go-no go decision. I was clueless and I was terrified, so I was basically just executing the plan, with the best available weather and sea-state information I could get. I was the weak link, not the boat. My skills, or lack thereof, were the limiting factor, and I had no rational basis on which to abandon the trip. Maybe the boat would fall off the trailer and be destroyed, I wouldn't have to go. Maybe I couldn't get the VHF antenna fixed, then I'd have an excuse. Heavy legs, apprehension. I was not having fun, at least not when I was contemplating going out on that ocean by myself. All the rest of that time was wonderful - the food, the company, Guaymas, meeting the other cruisers, sleeping with Jerry and Joni - well, in the bed next to them anyway. My apprehension stayed below a lot of the time and surfaced mostly while I was actually working on the boat.

Setting Off on The Sea of Cortez

Finally the day arrived, I could put it off no longer. "Optimal Weather Window", second-hand report said virtually no wind for the weekend, maybe now the ocean would be as glass smooth as I had imagined it would be when I first considered doing this trip. The Sea of Cortez, sheltered from the Pacific by Baja, from the Atlantic by Mexico, how bad could it be? Ha! This is definitely the stuff adventures are made of - inadequate information about the environment into which you are about to insert yourself. Combined with lack of proper skills, poor planning and lack of proper equipment, it has produced some amazingly exciting books and tales of survival. I was hoping that the care with which I had prepared the nav, comm, safety and survival part of the trip would be sufficient to make up for my inadequacies. Although if you wait until you are completely ready to go you will never leave the dock. So I just continued executing the plan.

Jerry and Joni went out of the marina with me, to show me how to get out without ending up an ornament on some of the sharp rocks that jut up everywhere along the shore, and some just out in Sea of Cortez Dec 2005 page

the water, in 80 feet of water, a rock just jutting up above the water. And that's as good as it gets - some of them hide just below the water, like a dog that bites but doesn't bark.

We went out a ways, Jerry mentioned that if I was going to meet my ETD we'd better get back. I think he just wanted off the boat. I took them back to the gas dock, they claimed it was so I could get going quicker, but it's possible that it was also their first chance to get out of Bananas and onto dry land, and they took it.

Hugs all around, my terror was abating, it was too late to be scared, now I just had to pull it off. About 2-minutes after I left them I looked down for maybe 5-seconds to adjust the motor angle, when I looked up I was heading straight into a rock wall, Oh! Shit! Slam it into reverse to stop the forward motion, then turn around and get the heck out of there! Before it was too late!

Out the mouth of the cove, past the submerged rocks, past the Pelican Poop Island, around the reef - I was going, it was actually happening. No fear, no anxiety, just executing the plan. And, somewhere in the back of my mind, a little voice whimpering "Why are we here?"

I recall feeling sheepish about going out with the small jib and in the first reef - it didn't seem too bad at that point, I just didn't want to take any chances. What a fortuitous decision.

A porpoise was jumping off the port bow, I thought that was a very good sign. The sea state was becoming increasingly larger, from dead-calm in the marina cove to decent but non-threatening waves as I got further out. And pretty soon the bigger rollers with white caps started in on me.

The waves coming at me were silhouetted against the darker northern sky. The incidence of whitecaps, looking like nasty white smiles on the crests of the waves, varied throughout the day, from most waves to occasionally. But they never stopped until the outer bay at Santa Rosalia. Jerry had told me that the wind would die down after dark and the sea should lay down then. At 12:30, half-past midnight, an unusually large wave with a big white smile crashed over the bow quarter, throwing the boat off track and heeling it violently to the windward. I thought about Jerry's words at that moment. I won't say what I thought about them, but I thought about them.

Early in the afternoon the waves going away from me were highlighted by the southern sky. From the trough, sitting in the cockpit, the shining waves rose up to about or slightly over eye level, it was beautiful, absolutely beautiful. Although just seconds ago those very waves were washing over the starboard bow, running a raging river down the starboard gunwale, flushing over and past the cabin windows and then back where they belonged, in the ocean.

From time to time things would seem to be getting better, the sea smoother. This always resulted in great disappointment, as the apparent calming would be followed by resuming intensity and more rough seas.

I left the motor running at about the start position and in gear. When I shut it off the boat speed would drift between 5 knots down to about 3 knots, but when I left it on the boat would do 5+

Sea of Cortez Dec 2005 page

knots pretty consistently. I had 18-gallons of gas on board (way too much for comfort, I was actually every bit as concerned about that much gasoline on board as I was the ocean), I could have motored all the way if I'd wanted to.

But the motor angle kept drifting off. I had loosened the screw that adjusts the force required to turn the motor while in the marina to be sure to have good control and reduce the risk of running into some 10-million dollar yacht, of which there were ample opportunities. But when the angle drifted off the motor was pushing the boat sideways, requiring constant tiller pressure to hold a course, so I decided to tighten the screw.

Unfortunately the motor was on the lee (downwind) side of the boat, and the wind was blowing pretty good, so when I'd lean over on the lee side to tighten the screw the boat would lean to the point that water would be running over the lee gunwale, right in front of my face as I was hanging off the stern (with the wrench tied onto my wrist, I might add). I quickly backed off the procedure a couple of times but as time went on I got a little bolder and finally I was able to get it tightened to the point where it would hold an angle. Thank goodness for the tiller pilot, I will take 2 next time.

Somewhere in here the motor quit inexplicably and wouldn't restart, I did start to get worried about this. My GPS mapper and radio were key elements of my safety plan, I didn't want to lose them and I wasn't sure how long the new battery would last even though it was completely charged before leaving. I wanted to make Santa Rosalia in about 18-hours. 5-knots for 90 nm (about) is 18 hours, 4-knots is 22 hours, 3-knots is 30 hours. I wanted to keep my average speed about 5-knots and to do that I felt I had to keep the motor running, so a dead-motor worried me some. If I couldn't have restarted it I probably would have turned back.

Jerry and Joni were watching me from on overlook and in contact via VHF radio. They asked how I was doing, I allowed as how I was getting my butt kicked, we talked a bit more, but not too much, I was pretty busy.

I got off the radio with Jerry, assuring him that everything seemed OK. I reached over and hung up the mic, then glanced down at the cabin sole - I'm sure my eyes got as large as saucers at that moment - there was water on the floor, perhaps an inch at that point and I didn't have a clue where it was coming from. Had the hull been compromised from the pounding, the violent, incessant slapping against the incoming waves? Was the centerboard trunk cracked? I tasted it to be sure it was salt water, to be sure that one of my water bottles hadn't just popped a lid and emptied itself. Definitely salty. I started moving things off the floor in a big hurry, a very big hurry. Pretty soon I had it cleared to the point I could see the centerboard trunk top and there was the problem, or at least part of it for sure. Every time a wave hit the bow a spurt of water would come out of the top of the centerboard trunk, mostly at the forward end, but some all along the edge. Irritating but if this was the whole problem, no worries, I could deal with this.

I bailed the water into a bucket using a sponge, I got about a gallon the first time, more than I thought.

Sea of Cortez Dec 2005 page

Jerry was starting to get worried about me now, he suggested I consider turning back, considering I was taking on water and complaining about getting my butt kicked by the waves. Once again I was in a position of insufficient experience to make a reasoned decision. I was not overly worried about the water coming in, it was very manageable. Plus I had, if all else failed, floatation to deploy, an inflatable dinghy, and an EPIRB, so I imagined that I had backup systems. All the folks I'd talked to in the dry dock had said this was a good weather window, that was all I knew. If this was what I should have expected then so be it, the boat seemed to be handling it better than me, I decided to just keep executing the plan until some definitive reason presented itself to change.

Radio comm was starting to fade a little, and I was pretty busy bailing, getting about 1/4 bucket (1/2 gallon) every 15 minutes - this was more water than I thought the centerboard trunk should be pumping, but it seemed pretty consistent so I just kept up regular bailing and watched the GPS track go further out to sea. Jerry had suggested GPS waypoints every 5 miles or so, it was a good idea. Making waypoints and seeing them recede helped with the fatigue as the day and night rolled on.

Every now and then, far too regularly for my liking, the boat would get slapped by a big breaking wave at just the right angle and take a violent turn to port, leaning 30 - 40 degrees to starboard (windward) and, at first at least, scaring me silly for a second. The roll and yaw would also lose the course for a bit, sometimes so badly that I'd have to disconnect the auto-pilot and bring it back to course manually before putting it back on autopilot. It happened so frequently that I got used to it, although when the boat would heel that much I never did totally ignore it. Even in the cabin I'd involuntarily lean to the high-side. Greg and I had tiller trouble on the way back across, I suspect it was these relatively dramatic maneuvers that contributed to the problem, it put loads of stress on the tiller/rudder. The autopilot, a Raymarine ST1000+, also failed about 5-miles out of Santa Rosalia, possibly because of the abuse, although it was sized correctly according to the Raymarine website.

When the autopilot was unable to maintain course I was on my own, and it was not easy to hold a heading. Fortunately the night sky had cleared and I could see stars, so I'd sight a star in relation to the sail or rigging and try to hold it there - that worked for short periods, although obviously I had to correct frequently because the star was moving (it wasn't the north star, I was using stars in the Southern Sky since I was sitting on the windward, i.e. north, side of the cockpit). Frequent calibration of my primitive star navigation was no problem however, since the boat was still being thrown hither and yon by the wave action and I had to make significant course corrections regularly. The autopilot, when it was working, did a much, much better job of navigating than I could do manually. I am so grateful that it lasted until I could see the lights of Santa Rosalia, I don't know what I would have done otherwise. The return trip underscored this. Greg, who piloted us back for most of the trip, had a tough time with it manually, not because of his skills, it was just hard.

Part of the night the moon was slightly visible behind thin clouds, sometimes all I could see was more light in the vicinity of where I thought it was. Toward moon-set it was visible as a round

Sea of Cortez Dec 2005 page

ball, for the first time all night. I could barely make out hints of mountains ahead of me (Tres Virgenes I think), and I had a hint of Isla Tortuga to the south, but I could make out nothing definitively, only hints of land masses.

The moon finally set, I recall a wave of dismay passing over me. It was dark now for sure, the white foam from the bow the only thing I could see at all in the faint starlight and reflected running lights. The rest was obscured by darkness. I held the course, redeploying the autopilot from time to time, but it was having trouble holding - it would still work but seemed to get off significantly more and more often.

I imagined a faint glow in the western sky ahead of the boat, it grew, I was pretty certain it must be Santa Rosalia, my spirits soared at that point. I was still a long way out, maybe 10-15 miles, but now I had something to steer by.

The vague glow grew into a distinct glow, then into a few globs of light and finally, into a thousand pinpoint of hope - I was getting there, I was within sight of the lights of Santa Rosalia.

As I got to within 3-4 miles of SR the sea-state started to calm, the breaking tops disappeared and the period between the waves seemed to lengthen, they were not as steep, nor were they as tall. I was getting some letup, finally, finally!

Santa Rosalia Harbor

I wanted to get into safe harbor so very, very badly, but it was pitch dark. All I could see was the lights of the town and the reflection of some of the lights on the water. I had a paper nav-chart of SR harbor, at 2-3 miles it was my only guide. GPS Mappers are only good within 2-3 miles in Mexico, not because the GPS isn't accurate but because the charts the GPS maps are made from aren't accurate. Most of them were done in the late 1800's by US or British warships, and some errors crept in that still exist. It is not uncommon at all to see the GPS track of your boat going through the middle of an island, or well onto shore. Trust your eyes, use the charts and GPS only as hints when you are close to land.

Jerry had told me to not go into a strange harbor in the dark. It seemed like good advice, but I was so very, very tired. I wanted to get in further, where it was calmer. I started in slowly, but I got spooked by things not looking perfectly like I thought they should, so I motored back out and did a heave-to. I pulled the main and jib sheets in pretty tight and tied the tiller over to leeward - this effectively put the boat into a situation where it would try to sail windward but would come up into the wind, stop, drift back a little, then do the whole cycle over. This prevents the boat from drifting aimlessly and slows the drift speed. It worked great, I was drifting less than 1 nm/hr according to the GPS SOG (Speed Over Ground) display, no worries, I was a long way out. I made sure all my running lights were working, turned on my masthead light, sat down in the cabin door and waited for dawn, about an hour away I guessed. I saw a few flashes of lightning to the east, it got my attention but it seemed a long way off, so I just sat it out.

I hung out in the outer bay until dawn started to come over the eastern horizon, about an hour. I was cold and wet, and so very, very tired. I allowed myself to close my eyes but I had never really slept, so I was plenty motivated to get into Santa Rosalia harbor, inside the breakwater. I unstrapped the tiller, started the motor and started heading in. I probably could have made it in the dark, the opening was pretty large, but this was OK as well, and lots safer. On the way in I passed a huge Mexican Navy vessel, maybe 100' or more, heading out in the grey pre-sunrise dawn. I was surprised at the size, I didn't think the Mexican Navy would have ships that large.

I lined up on the lights, stayed to the left side of the channel to avoid the shelf marked on the chart and motored into the harbor. It was well protected and almost dead calm. Not much stirring, a few pangas, open Mexican fishing boats maybe 20 feet long with big outboards, nothing else.

I looked for the marina slips, finally spied it, motored over slowly, headed into an open slip and tied up - I'd made it! Amazing!

Toby, one of the resident live-aboards in the marina, showed up pretty soon, I quizzed him about protocol, he said Ricardo, the harbormaster, would be down about 9 a.m., I could sign in then. Toby suggested a restaurant downtown, a few blocks away, that would have coffee and hot food, I set off. I was cold, still pretty wet, and feeling like I was walking on air - my feet may not have touched the ground, I'm not sure. I was so proud of myself I cannot really relate the feeling. It was grand, in the most profound sense of the word. I had put myself out there on what to me was a pretty significant venture and I'd made it, at least this far. I was really proud of myself, although I will admit that on the way downtown I was toying with the possibility of putting the boat on the ferry to get it back over - I considered myself pretty lucky to have made it without swimming and I was not yet ready to give the sea another shot at me.

Back on Land

Breakfast was good, coffee, chiliboules (stale corn tortillas sauted in chili sauce or salsa, covered with a variety of toppings, depending on where you are) and eggs, it was wonderful. Hardly anybody spoke English, but somehow they managed to figure out what I wanted so it worked. My Spanish class on Audio CD came in mighty handy, it helped a lot plus the local folks seemed to appreciate that I was trying to speak their language.

I walked around downtown a little, two streets running perpendicular to the shore, just a few hundred meters in from the harbor. Two dirty cobblestone streets, lined with shops and nothing that looked even remotely like a major business except a few beer stores and a bank sign, it was wonderful. I headed back to the marina for a shower and to wash and dry clothes. My front hatch had leaked a small amount of water on the trip over, not enough to be worrisome from a flooding standpoint but enough to wet some clothes and bedding I had stashed on the V-berth. I needed to get that stuff fixed up before it started to smell.

The Santa Rosalia marina was quite interesting. It was self-service, and on the honor-system. If

Sea of Cortez Dec 2005 page

you wanted a beer you got one out of the cooler and put a mark on your tally sheet. Same for washing, everything. Use it, put your mark down on the tabulation sheet and settle up at the end. Ricardo showed up finally, I signed in, and headed for the boat to get my stuff.

The water heater was self-service as well, you had to light it yourself, but that was no problem. Waiting for the water to heat up was not too exciting, but it all passed into history after I got a warm shower. The beers started while I was waiting for the water to heat up, it was 10 a.m., but I'd been up now for about 30 hours so I didn't feel even a little bit guilty, more elated actually. It was wonderful.

I met some really cool folks in the Santa Rosalia Marina - Toby in a Westsail 32, who had greeted me early on was from San Diego, living aboard for about 10-years, the last 2 in SR. Lou and Billy came out of their Tayana 37 pretty soon, a retired electrical engineer and his wife, married 40+ years. Billy allowed as how she liked the life, Lou so proud of his boat he was bursting, seemingly loving the life. And Guillermo, a retired British Columbia civil service worker (housing services to the BC Indians) on his mastless J-32 that he was proud to inform me he had gotten for ?\$2500? And would have less than \$3500 in when he was finished! He showed me a \$1600 Reverse Osmosis water purifier that he had gotten with a bunch of other used stuff for \$25. If Guillermo wants to buy something from you don't sell it to him, you must be selling it way too cheap. He was a totally cool guy, as were all the folks. Ricardo, the harbor master and marina manager, had been an underwater welder and worked in the Santa Rosalia copper mines. That was the reason for Santa Rosalias founding in the 1800's by the French who had a concession from the Mexican Gov to mine the world-class copper ore deposits there. Everybody had an interesting story, it was pretty cool.

I messed around the boat for a while, then headed up the church to be there by noon, as I had relayed to Greg through his sister. I hadn't actually spoken to Greg for about a month, and had only had a couple of emails from him, Leigh was the communication link. The church was the historical Eiffel (of Tower and Statue of Liberty fame)-designed church. It had been built in France for shipment to Africa, something went wrong and it ended up in Santa Rosalia. World-renowned. As was the famous Santa Rosalia bakery, just up the street.

While waiting I went to a tortilleria that was right there near the church, the flour tortillas were coming off a steel griddle, hot and translucent. They were wonderful, absolutely wonderful. Hot, yummy, soft. I slathered them with Salsa Verde that I had gotten in a little grocery store earlier and ate them in front of the church, I was in heaven.

Greg didn't show, I was not surprised, nor was I worried - Greg keeps his own schedule, however he is not unreliable, just on his own schedule. If he says he'll be there he will be, maybe not exactly when you wanted him there, but sometime within a not-unreasonable window. And waiting was not a chore, it was a treat. Some bikers from Holland took my picture while I was eating in front of the church, they thought it looked cool. I questioned that but no worries, whatever.

As tired as I had been early in the day I managed to stay awake all day. The tortillas and salsa had been my lunch, I decided I'd hike downtown early evening to see about a dinner place. I looked around and finally used my new-found Spanish on a policeman, "Donde esta el restaurante de mariscos?". he pointed to a brightly lit courtyard a block down, I headed toward it.

The days in December are pleasantly warm but the evenings cool off pretty good. I bypassed the courtyard and went in the inside looking for a table. There was Toby, he invited me to join him, which I was pleased to do. It was at this point in my journey that I started to get a slightly different picture of what I'd done.

We started talking, Toby quizzing me about my voyage, and talking about his sailing experiences. Pretty soon he related how surprised he was to see that little boat coming in that morning, any boat actually - the ferry hadn't even been running until just that morning, the seas had been too high - and the ferry is a big, big boat, carrying people, cars and trucks from Guaymas to Santa Rosalia multiple times a week - but not this week because of the sea state. Toby said they'd had one of the biggest systems come through that he remembered just a few days ago and it had gotten things stirred up pretty good. He couldn't believe his eyes when he saw the little boat come in the harbor. Oh, Shit! I had not expected to be coming across in epic conditions, I just thought what I was getting was pretty normal (and I'm not sure it wasn't, actually, for this time of year). As he was talking I recalled the look of minor astonishment on the lady at San Carlos who I had, per Mexican regulation, checked out with just before I left. She had the slip with the boat size on it, she asked where I was going I said across to Santa Rosalia, she looked down at the slip and then back up to me with a funny look and said "Oh!". I should have known then I was in for some serious fun. Toby thought I was crazy, but he bought my dinner, including two Grande Margaritas which were really quite good, so if he wanted to think I was crazy no worries, he'd paid for the privilege.

It was fun having dinner with Toby, we talked of a variety of things, he is an interesting guy. The food was excellent, I had a braised fish with garlic sauce, it was wonderful. We headed back to the marina, it was getting late. The streets were crowded with folks, the street vendors were out with their lighted stands, cooking up tacos carne asada, fish tacos, salchichas, all manner of great smelling street food. I'd avoided it so far, maybe later, when I was closer to my van and a way home just in case it didn't agree with me.

I slept great on the boat, as I always do. Something about the imperceptible rocking that puts me into a deep sleep.

The next day was much more laid back, I was rested. I hung out with the marina crowd for a while, visited with Lou and Billy, with Ricardo, with Guillermo, and with Toby, life was good. I grabbed a shrimp taco in the morning but I was afraid to lay into it with the veggies and sauces, in retrospect that was a mistake I'm sure. At the church again at noon, no Greg, no worries. I explored more of the town, hit the bakery, loaded up on more Salsa Verde and headed back to the boat.

Greg Arrives

I was doing something inside the boat when I heard someone berating me about something, I knew that Greg had arrived. I was delighted to see him and his amiga Cathy, she had driven him there from Loreto, about 120 km S of Santa Rosalia. It was wonderful. I hauled out the Sauza 100% de agave azure which I'd been saving, mostly at least, for this occasion and we all had a celebratory pull on the bottle - life was good.

Unloading Greg's stuff was too much to deal with right then, we headed up to the marina to mark off a bunch of beers and make a plan.

As the beers started to dwindle we decided to walk downtown, it was perhaps 1/4 to 1/2 mile, no problem. We did some exploring, came back and Greg and Cathy headed out to find a place to stay in SR. They came back toward dinner time and we hiked into town again for some real food - the place where Toby and I had eaten the night before was my choice, it was pretty good. Dinner was great, I don't recall what I had, but Cathy had a beef dish that tasted excellent - it was chewier than U.S. beef but lots more flavorful, I wished I'd tried it. Sonoran beef is well known and well respected for it's flavor, this may have been the stuff.

I slept well on the boat again, I don't know why. All the hot sauce I'd eaten the evening before as well as the Salsa Verde I'd swilled with the torts caught up with me early in the morning. I didn't want to use the toilet on board, the marinas didn't have pump-out facilities, and the marina toilet was a hundred yards away, past 3 locked doors, I was in trouble. Fortunately I had some bail-buckets on board, one of which served quite well as an emergency head on this occasion, as well as one other time later in the trip. I crept quietly up to the marina toilet later on and emptied the bucket. Fortunately I'd brought along some concentrated bathroom cleaner to keep the interior of the boat sanitary, it worked great to clean up the poor bucket. You don't get to put toilet paper down the toilet in Mexico, so by each toilet there is a trashbucket filled with used toilet paper - nasty - I guess it clogs up the pipes.

I messed around on the boat for a while, walked up the hill to see what was up there and wandered back to the boat. I waited for breakfast for Greg and Cathy to show up. It was quite a while. They had eaten when they got there, I was hosed, no worries, I had eaten enough lately that I could go a long time without food and not get skinny. We started the luggage transfer.

Greg had 2 large duffles, very large duffles, and a bunch of smaller bags and cases - this was not something that he had kept hidden from me, but the reality of it piled on the dock next to the boat was a little overwhelming. The marina folks came out to watch, they pretty much all thought we'd have to get another boat, and that wasn't really funny - Bananas was pretty far down in the water when we got done.

Lou had volunteered to get us weather reports off of his SSB (Single Side Band), a long distance marine radio. VHF is good for maybe 20 miles (line-of-sight), but SSB can transmit 2,000 - 6,000 miles under the right conditions. It bounces off the ionosphere. You can get NOAA

Sea of Cortez Dec 2005 page

weather fax off of SSB as well as text and verbal reports. Apparently there was somebody who reported every morning on SSB regarding sea of Cortez weather, Lou was relaying the info to us.

Lou said we would have good weather for the rest of the week. Then Lou said we would only have good weather for a couple of more days. Then Lou said "It'll be like this for the rest of the week", "like this" being almost dead calm inside the breakwater. Anyway, it seemed to be changing hourly and I guess that is not untypical. Toby suggested that if we had a schedule to meet, such as getting home for Christmas, we'd probably better get going, the weather looked OK right now but the window could close at any time.

This made total sense but it also made me very sad. I wanted to see Baja, more than just Santa Rosalia. The original plan had been to go to Santa Rosalia, then S to Loreto and pick up Greg, than back along the coast exploring, then back across to SC. Time didn't allow that so we adjusted to meet in SR, then planned to go S about 40 miles to Bahia Conception, a large, protected bay reputed to be gloriously beautiful. The boat was totally equipped and provisioned for doing this - we had a dinghy with motor, food, fresh water, a generator, whatever we needed to survive quite nicely for a few days away from civilization. It was not by accident, it had been a lot of work. And now it wasn't going to happen. I was bummed - for about 15 minutes I'd guess. Then the thought of getting messed up on getting home for Christmas or, worse, getting into a marginal weather situation, overwhelmed any remorse I was feeling and life was good again, we had a plan.

Cathy left after lunch, Greg and I continued to ready the boat for the trip back across. We decided to do street-vendor food for dinner, it was fine with me, even if I got sick we should be back in San Carlos by day-after tomorrow, no worries. Greg and Cathy, as well as the Lonely Planet Baja guide, had all recommended trying the Salchichas - deep-fried bacon wrapped hot-dogs. Just the thought of eating a hot-dog nearly causes my heart to stop, let alone the 25 gm of fat that come with most of them, but eating one wrapped in bacon, deep-fried, it sounded like years off of my life, I couldn't imagine it. Greg persisted, I said I'd get one, take a bite and he'd have to eat the rest. That is not what happened.

The chef (I may be misusing that word) cooks the hotdog wrapped in bacon in the boiling oil, puts it in the bun, then slathers it with all sorts of toppings - onions sauted in butter, salsa verde, crema (cream and sour cream), mayonnaise, all kinds of stuff - you wonder how it stays on, and in fact it doesn't, it's quite messy. Then he wraps the whole thing in a napkin and hands it to you, offering you a fried jalapeno at the same time. I took one bite and I was hooked, it was heavenly. I couldn't believe it. I wolfed mine down, Greg got none of it. I couldn't believe it. After I got home I made Salchichas for Sue, her daughter and myself one evening, I had a package of eight (8) hot dogs, we ate them all, fighting over the last two! It's amazing, and Sue (or me either for that matter) doesn't eat hotdogs! Ha!

Everything after the Salchichas was anti-climactic. They were so good. Frozen fruit juice on a stick was good. So was just walking the streets and seeing the energy. This wasn't a very big town, maybe 10,000 but the downtown life was bustling at night, it was pretty cool - dirty

Sea of Cortez Dec 2005 page

streets, dogs everywhere, lighted street-vendor carts, I was definitely not in Tulsa. We headed back to the boat for the night.

The next morning was breakfast in the French Quarter at the top of the hill. I had Bistek Ranchero which turned out to be a spicy beef and broth creation that was outstanding.

We headed back to the boat to take Toby's advice and get while the getting was good. Guillermo and Ricardo were the only ones there, Toby, Billy and Lou had taken the bus to Mulege (Mule-ahay) for the day while we were at breakfast. I was sad to have missed them but I guess this is the life - you meet interesting folks and then either you or they are gone off somewhere, perhaps to be seen again, who knows.

The shower was out of fuel, so the clothes dryer didn't work either, and no hot water for showers, it could have been better, but after all this was Mexico.

Heading Back Across to San Carlos

We left the safety of the harbor and set off on a relatively calm sea. Isla Tortuga (which looked like a gargantuan tortoise from the Baja-side profile, hence the name I'd guess) was visible for most of the day from that point on. The early part of the trip was pretty uneventful, rolling waves, nice wind. We shut off the motor for a while and just sailed, it was pleasant, but the wind would die and we'd come down to 3 knots, the motor was tolerable if it kept our speed at 5-knots or more and thus our passage to 18 hours or less.

About mid-afternoon Greg sighted what he thought was squall line to the north and got a little excited. Upon closer inspection it seemed to be quite a ways off so we ignored it for the time being, we had more pressing issues.

The tiller, which had apparently been damaged on the trip over, but said damage going unnoticed in Santa Rosalia, was becoming increasingly unmanageable. It was clearly going to fail completely if we didn't do something. And it was getting dark. I was at the tiller at the time, we decided on a course of action. I would steer the boat with the motor, Greg would pull the tiller and attempt to tighten it up so that it would possibly hold together until we got to SC. Seemed pretty straightforward, so we loosened the screw on the motor that limits turning and got on with it.

Steering with the motor is easy in the marina, and it makes the boat very responsive, a good thing if you are trying to miss other boats and docks and such. Out here it was terrible. A slight change in the motor angle would send the boat off on a complete 360-degree turn, including an accidental jibe, all in less time than it took to notice what was happening - the sails were still up, the motor on close to idle, but the prop was able to exert total and dictatorial control over the boat, so any change in motor angle was too much - it was awful. Experience helped some, but not much - it was just not a good thing, with the wind and the waves and such.

Greg finally got the tiller tightened up and, despite a little trouble getting the pintles back into the gudgeons because of the water pressure on the rudder, pretty soon we were back to tiller control and had some hope of the tiller/rudder holding together for a while longer. Tightening the motor angle-adjustment screw was no problem on this leg, the motor was now on the windward side of the boat and leaning over to tighten it did nothing more than stand the boat up a little straighter, as opposed to the trip over when the same event plunged the lee gunwale into the ocean. Much better this way.

As light started to fade the wind picked up a little. Almost on a whim, but with the increasing wind velocity in mind, I decided to put the main in the second reef. It was now completely dark, whatever moon might be out totally obscured by the clouds that had been covering the sky most of the day. By headlamps, both mine and Greg's, I went forward and started reefing. The sail slugs hung up in the track, so I had to step up on the cabin top, this caused Greg a little concern since the prospect of me going overboard seemed greatly increased, but I was till hooked in, always actually, and everything went well. Holding the nose into the wind was a little dicey, but all ended well, the second reef was in, Greg turned the boat east and on we went.

Greg was having trouble holding course, but it wasn't his fault - if you took your eyes off the compass for a second the boat was way off course. Sail trim was adjusted for a neutral rudder, but the wave action would just bounce the boat off course, the surfing routine, except perhaps a little worse this time, the seas were almost abeam. It was intense. No stars to place in the rigging, no visual clues at all, just a compass heading to hold. It worked both of us pretty hard through the night.

In the darkness, with just a very faint amount of light coming through the clouds, it was possible to imagine land masses ahead and to the north. A large island should be to the north, and we were both certainly hoping that some land lay ahead, as perhaps the Mexican mainland, but we could not discern it clearly. Sometimes it looked like Tetas de Cabro, Goat Teats, i.e. the distinctive rock formation above San Carlos marina. Sometimes not. But we were on track, I trusted the GPS completely. My track from the trip over was still clearly visible, in fact I could see it all the way into the San Carlos marina. I was happy about that, it would be useful when we got close to SC.

The land masses grew, the wind grew, we were moving along at about 5-6 knots most of the time, things were going pretty well. Toward 1 a.m. the lights of SC began to glow, we were getting close. We moved to within 10 miles and I decided to check the track from the trip over to see where to steer as we got in - I had set the waypoints while in the dry dock, the first two waypoints had ended up on land because of disparities between the charts and reality. I thought I had seen the entire track earlier, but now when I looked all I saw was the part where I was past the rocks and reef - Oh well, it was still pretty good, there was still enough track to get us directly lined up with the SC Marina entrance, after which the lights should guide us.

We moved closer to shore, now about 4 miles out, I checked the track again - it was disappearing before my very eyes! I suspected, and later confirmed, that there must be a limit on how much

Sea of Cortez Dec 2005 page

track could be displayed and, dark miracle, we had just barely exceeded it. Oh, well, such is life for the neophyte mariner.

We could see lights up toward Guaymas, we could see what appeared to be San Carlos town lights, we could clearly see the Tetas de Cabro and we could see lights to the N of Tetas de Cabro, i.e. Marina Real and the build-up along the "Catch 22" beach, where the movie of the same name was filmed a few years back. Greg was lobbying for heading into San Carlos marina that night, we could a red light that was in the correct place for the entrance, but no green light was showing.

I steadfastly refused to go any closer without seeing both lights, I recalled the rocks with the unlighted makeshift bouy over them, I recalled Jerry and Joni telling me about the reef, I remembered Pelican Poop Island and lots and lots of hazards, easily missed if you can see them, maybe not so easy if you can't - in fact, no maybe about it. I hauled out Charlies Charts and looked at the anchorage options. Based on what we could discern visually none of them were without risk. I was going no closer than the 4-miles we were sitting off right then. We doused the main, tightened the jib sheet and tied the tiller to lee - it had worked off of SR, it should work here. The sea state was somewhat calmer, rolling swells, no breakers, the boat rolled uncomfortably but our line of drift was clear, both visually from looking toward the lights as well as on the GPS, we could do this until dawn broke, no worries. This pseudo tranquility lasted about 30-minutes.

Quickly, very quickly, the boat was hit with substantial winds - the squall line that Greg had seen earlier in the day had hit us - whipping surface of the sea up into a soup of air and salt water.

Looking north you could see the layer of salt spray over the surface - it reminded me of a ground blizzard up in Iowa - very limited visibility close to the ground, blue skies above - of course here we had no blue skies, just clouds with streaks of faint illumination from the moon above them. The spray was thick and breaking over both sides of the bow. I stuck my head above the cabin sliding hatch, I was soaked immediately. Greg was ready and so was I, there was no longer any disagreement about the course of action to be taken, we were looking for an anchorage.

We cranked up the motor and headed N - there were anchorage options there but that also put our bow directly into the wind, a good thing at that point. We watched the lights in the Marina Real area brighten, when we were almost directly W of them we turned E and started moving in. At about 2-miles (guessing, the GPS maps weren't too good here, but visually about that) we slowed to idle, although the 70% jib was still deployed. We could see dark splotches against a very dimly lighted sky, it looked like rocks on the N side of TdC. We crept in, headed toward the lights. A red light was dimly visible off to our left, but no green, that was all wrong. We could see water for about 20-30 yards around the boat, but we could also see land dimly off our port bow quarter and clearly off our starboard bow quarter - a good ways off. Greg spotted a very low lying rock to our port, we gave it a wide berth and crept in. I did not want to end up on the rocks, for a variety of reasons, probably the main one being the overpowering, worse-than-death humiliation of it all. We crept in, barely moving, Greg watching to starboard and steering while I

Sea of Cortez Dec 2005 page

was standing in the cabin companionway, looking to port. We crept in, this took a while.

Anchorage

The lovely lights we had been seeing slowly disappeared before our very eyes. As tired as we were it didn't take a lot of sense to figure out what was going on - there was a big chunk of unseen rock between us and them, and as we got closer they were dropping behind it. We crept in. The sea was getting calmer, but tensions on the boat were rising. It was pretty intense. Finally all the lights had disappeared except for two lights quite close together, and quite close to the water. We could see the rocks to port, as well as dimly ahead. The sea here was calm, the depth was about 30 feet, this was looking pretty good. We did a very slow 360, surveying the bottom depth with the sounder, it looked good, we got off plenty far enough for anchor swing to not be a problem even if I deployed all 300 feet of rode and dropped anchor - we were safe for the time being.

Amazingly, just about the time the anchor was deployed the clouds were swept away, the near-full moon came out and the glory of where we were became evident. A beach was directly to the east of us, shining bluish-white in the moonlight with a substantial rocky hill rising to the east of it. To the S of us was the north face of Tetas de Cabro, brightly lighted by the moon, and to the N of us a high jetty of rocks extending well out to the W, providing good protection from the NW winds. The water was dead calm in the anchorage. The adrenaline of the trip and entry, the beauty of the place - and a couple of shots of Sauza - turned that moment into one of the most exhilarating I have ever experienced. It was fantastic. Greg crawled forward and made a place for himself in the berth, I sat down on the cooler that was directly below the cabin hatch, still clipped in, still in my life jacket, soaking wet, and both of us went to sleep. Sweet, safe sleep.

The next thing I knew it was quite light, the sun being well up but still obscured by TdC, and I was freezing, shivering uncontrollably. My clothes were still pretty wet. But that was quickly overshadowed by the incredible beauty of the place - simply fantastic, even after the adrenaline and Tequila of earlier had been metabolized, the place was glorious beyond words. You won't know until you go. I could hear the shrimp clicking, although I didn't know that was what it was at the time, I thought the boat was coming apart.

But glorious or not, we were hungry for hot food and I was freezing, plus the water looked calm right now, we wanted to get into SC marina before the Sof C kicked up, so we hauled in the anchor and headed out for SC.

As we left the quiet anchorage the sun was shining brightly on the S of C and we could see a line of porpoises jumping further out to sea - I hollered to Greg, it was a grand sight. As we motored S toward San Carlos marina I could see that we had anchored in one of the target spots. Things had worked out perfectly, I was quite relieved.

The sea was covered by flights of pelicans, perhaps a hundred or more in each flight, and many flights, going out to hunt for breakfast - Dawn Patrol. The birds would fly just inches off the Sea of Cortez Dec 2005 page

sparkling water, not even 6-inches but 2 or 4 inches, their breasts skimming the sea. So resolute and dignified, their long beaks jutting forward, their wings pumping rhythmically. They seemed in perfect formation, neatly spaced, in a slight diagonal off their line of flight. When a formation would approach the boat just those members who were heading directly toward the boat would rise, still in formation, but now bending upwards in an arc, and further apart, until they cleared the boat, then they would fall into their neat, sea-skimming formation again and go on. It was magic.

We rounded the point of TdeC and it was obvious what had been going on earlier in the morning, when we were trying to find an anchorage - we had been seeing the red light of the entrance to SCM through a cut in a solid rock prominence. Heading toward that red light, had we done it with as much caution as we ultimately used getting to our anchorage, would probably have turned out OK, but it would most certainly not have gotten us into SCM. Greg allowed as how it was the right thing to do to not go on in there earlier, and I was validated in my own mind as well - we did the right thing, it was a good call - There are Old Pilots and there are Bold Pilots, but there are no Old, Bold Pilots.

Return to San Carlos

We motored into the marina, pulled up into a transient dock and prepared for the next phase of our adventure. Rent a slip, shower, assess the carnage from the trip over in terms of clothes that needed care, etc. Then walk up to Marina Seca, hook up with Jerry & Joni, retrieve the van, then off to food, wonderful, hot food. It means so much more under circumstances like these.

J&J took us to dinner that evening, in celebration of us surviving. I can't really remember too many details about the day, I was so tired, and elated.

The Lotus was scheduled to launch the next day, Greg and I managed to be on the tail end of it, but it was pretty awesome - the boat is up on manual jacks, a big trailer with more hydraulic jacks backs undedr it, raises the hydraulic jacks to lift the boat, then remove the manual jacks. Then off it goes, down the road to the marina, in this particular case with Joni riding in the boat, about 25 feet above the pavement, it made me nervous but she seemed fine with it.

J&J launched their boat uneventfully and you could tell that they were both elated, they were home again - the lotus as a boat again. They sold everything before they left, this is their only home for the next 7 - 12 years (their circumnavigation plan), so I can certainly understand. We motored over to Marina Real, close to where we had anchored the morning before after the passage, Greg and I were both surprised at how much the SofC chop moved their boat, it is 36 feet long, made of steel, displaces about 30,000 pounds, and it still was rolling in the chop.

Arrive at Marina Real, shuttle back to SC, pick up the vehicles, lunch, J&J back to their boat, Greg and I headed toward Guaymas. Guaymas is about 100,000 folks and not a tourist town to speak of, it's the real deal - diesel busses, crowded streets full of small shops, noise, it is wonderful. We found the local market where lots of small stalls were crowded into a couple of

Sea of Cortez Dec 2005 page

buildings and narrow streets and stocked up on Christmas Gifts. Back to SC, Greg was interested in shopping for fishing tackle.

El Pescador

Against his own better instincts, but egged on by his nere-do-well father, Greg sprung for \$120 worth of fishing pole and tackle. It was a good deal, he wanted to go fishing, and there wouldn't be a better place to try it than here for quite a while. The experience would be remembered lots longer than the \$120, I was glad he did it. Plus it was his money.

Somewhere in here we checked out of Marina San Carlos and motored over to Marina Real to get a slip closer to J&J. This whole trip was made 100, maybe 1000 times better from hooking up with Jerry and Joni, no sense in messing with a good thing.

We took J&J out that evening to celebrate the Lotus Launch, a big event. J&J are heading toward Ecuador, then W to the Galapagos and the Marqueses - what a grand adventure! They have enormous courage, not just for being willing to sail out onto Mother Ocean, but for being willing to commit so much to their dreams - Jerry built the Lotus with his own two hands, I saw it take shape over a number of years, it was incredible. And Joni was right in there the whole way, making sails, working on the details - these folks have a world class relationship. They are very special people.

The next morning we headed out fishing at a not-so-very-early hour. The fish finder said we were running over herds and herds of fish, but nothing good was happening on the end of Greg's line. He was in the dinghy, an 8' inflatable with a 2 HP engine on it, he looked like he was having fun, but he had to look that way after spending all that money on tackle the day before. No luck.

Our boat-shopping tour got cancelled, we messed around and did apparently nothing, since I have absolutely no recollection of any of it. We were starting to think about getting home now. It was the 17th, if we took the boat out of the water tomorrow and hit the road early on Monday the 19th we could be home by the evening of the 20th, just 4 days before Christmas. It was starting to sould pretty inviting to me, and I know Greg was anxious to get home.

Eat too much, drink too much, sleep too much, get up the next morning and head out fishing one more time. I hung out in the sailboat, just drifting aimlessly, while Greg motored around in the dinghy, striking fear in the fish I'm sure. It was a tiny little boat and a pretty big sea, I lost sight of him quite often, but tried to stay close for safety reasons - he had the hand-held VHF radio, we were never out of contact.

Greg followed the sea birds who were working the sea for breakfast. The birds knew where the little fish were, and the little fish attracted the bigger fish, such as the tuna Greg was after, it was a good plan. Pretty soon I heard him yell "Tuna for Dinner! I caught a yellowtail!" - he was wild with excitement. He'd gone fishing out of Loreto a few days back and gotten into some

Sea of Cortez Dec 2005 page

yellowtails, but this time he had done it on his own and he was thrilled. It was a beautiful fish.

He fished a bit more then we headed back to clean the fish and keep it at the peak of freshness. The boat trip was over. Greg cleaned his fish and I made arrangements to pull Bananas out of the water.

We grilled the fillets and the head on J&J's grill, the meat was wonderful. The head is full of very tender and flavorful flesh, highly recommended. The 4 of us just sat there eating it with our fingers with no flavoring other than some lime, it was the best fish I have ever eaten, certainly the freshest.

By the time we went to sleep that evening, in Jerry and Joni's boat, Bananas was rigged for the trip home and absolutely covered with salt and fine dirt from the derig area where I had pulled it. When everything was tied down we had hauled it over to Marina Seca and parked it for the night, now even the trip itself was drawing to a close.

Heading Home

We hit the road early the next morning after some sad goodbyes. Breakfast in Hermosilla, then on to a 2-hour passage through the U.S. border inspectors. They searched the boat and van, but they were actually disassembling a small pickup that was next to us, they had it on a hoist and were removing large sections of the underbody. Maybe they had a tip or maybe one of the dogs had gotten suspicious, but whatever it was somebody was getting a really good going over.

Tucson by dinner time, heading east on I-10, N at Las Cruces but we didn't buy gas. No worries we had 6-gallons on the boat. We rolled into Truth or Consequences on fumes at 2 a.m., both of us totally beat. Down the road a bit, into a reststop, Greg slept in the boat, I slept in the cab, we got a nice early start the next day.

Lunch at The Big Texan, a famous landmark restaurant in Amarillo, then the long, boring drive across the Texas Panhandle and Oklahoma. Uneventful, except for another running-on-fumes episode, then home, safe, in Tulsa at about 7 p.m.

Glad to be home, but sad that one of the best trips I'd ever been on was now over. Nothing about the trip had been contrived or fake, it was all real, sometimes too real. But that reality was behind us now, and we were in our other reality. Back home with our family. Not so bad, even after a totally world-class trip, not so bad.

#####