

Baja Voyage (cont'd) Day 9

We got up reasonably early the next morning and rowed into the marina where we found Ricardo. He agreed to take his pickup to collect some propane, reverse osmosis drinking water, and some gasoline for us and several other boaters. He would do this at no charge, but it was expected that you would tip 5 bucks or so. Since he had some other things to do and it would be several hours before he returned, we had some time to kill. We walked into downtown Santa Rosalea in the bright morning light. The town was architecturally unusual compared to the other Mexican towns we saw on the drive down to BLA.

I previously mentioned that the French built the town in the 1880's. All the old public and most of the old private buildings were of French design with wrought iron balconies and cobbled courtyards. Many of the courtyards had very old trees to shade them. Also, the older houses were built of wood, not brick, concrete or adobe. Much of the wood came from California and was redwood; the rest was imported from Europe. The most interesting structure was a prefab metal church built in France and shipped over to this remote location. The architecture was neo-gothic, but the ironwork had a familiar flow and shape. The designer was none other than Gustaffe Eiffel, the designer of the Eiffel tower. It was kind of neat to find something so French in Baja. Oh yes, one of the French traditions they kept was the excellent bread from the panaderia. We had a nice brunch at a café and found the bank with an ATM to get some cash. We were getting quite low. (Remote is nice, but technology is nice too on occasion.)

Brad and I spent the afternoon talking and doing small chores. We picked up our gas, water, and propane from Ricardo when he returned. We were pleased to get the propane, since we had had no propane for the first part of the trip. We were getting tired of cold food or BBQ. With another foray into town for forgotten items and last minute ice cream, late in the afternoon we left and headed for the nearby island of San Marcos (10 nm).



Sunset to the stern with pangas, heading east to Isla San Marcos

As the sun crept closer to the horizon, we passed a number of pangas out early, fishing for squid. Now when I thought of squid, I pictured some cute diminutive creatures about 6 inches long and sliced up into fat

little rubber bands, very good if breaded and sautéed in garlic butter. What we saw was very different! Each panga usually had two fishermen with long lines and a multi-barbed jig. The jigs had a luminescent plastic body. The fisherman would drop the weighted jig into the water 100 to 200 feet down. Attracted to the luminescence, the squid would envelop the jig and get impaled on the barbs. The fishermen would then pull in the line hand over hand. As the fisherman hauled them on board and the squid broke the surface, they would shoot great geysers of water that would turn black. These were not just any old squid, but Humboldt squid as thick as your calf and perhaps 3 feet long not counting the thick 2-foot long tentacles. With a shake, the fisherman would flip off the squid and toss the jig back into the water again. The whole process took only a minute or two. They would pause to bail out the water in the boat, flinging buckets of jet-black water and squid ink into the sea. They stacked the still-twitching squid like cordwood and returned to jigging. When their freeboard decreased to what seemed like a few inches, they would head back to the harbor.

We spent so much time watching the fishermen we were concerned about making San Marcos with sufficient light to enter the rock bound cove where we planned to anchor. We motored on, when all of a sudden, there were loud smacks around us. The mystery of the flying “penguins” was solved. Leaping up to 8 feet out of the water were fat 2-foot long, black and white manta rays (maybe eagle rays). They would burst out of the water still “flapping” their “wings” and inscribe a beautiful arc slipping back into the water headfirst. Or just as often, they would cartwheel through the air flashing black & white and end in a mother of a belly flop. There must have been a couple schools of 50 or more around us. I assumed they were trying to rid themselves of parasites, or perhaps they were just being exuberant. As the last light was fading, we slipped into a small cove on the northwest part of the island of San Marcos.

My brother is a bit of a techno-geek and made a really neat contraption. It was composed of a “waterproof” bullet camera about the size of a hotdog, usually used for home security. This was hooked up to his regular video camera display by a 100’ cable. To ensure the waterproof quality of the camera, he dipped the whole thing in some blue vinyl coating, the sort of stuff used to cover tool handles. He proposed that we dangle this contraption over the side of the boat and see “what’s down there”. Hence the name of his invention, “The Blue Dangle”. (Isn’t there a song by that name, by Strauss?)



My big lantern lighting the way for the “Blue Dangle”

Anyway, after dinner and dishes, fortified by a couple of Pacificos, we decided to do the Jacques Cousteau thing. With terrible French accents and acting more like Clouseau than Cousteau, we proceeded.

I had a huge rechargeable, 3 million candlepower, handheld spotlight that I shined toward the bottom 30 feet below. I would switch it on and off to watch the swirling phosphorescence caused by all the photophylic plankton. Within a few minutes there were thousands of tiny shrimp swimming, always counterclockwise, around the shaft of light. The zooplankton was attracting all sorts of strange fish. It was the perfect environment for Brad's "Blue Dangle". I lowered it down into the shaft of light, while Brad peered into his monitor. Excited comments followed as Brad saw all sorts of interesting fish. Then....."Oh my God! Oh my God! Something just ate the 'Blue Dangle'" Brad exclaimed. I thought he was just kidding until the line attached to the ""Blue Dangle went taut in my hand with a strong surging pull. "Save the Dangle" was the chant as "me hearties" heaved on the line. Arrgh! We finally brought the "Dangle" to



Mass of tiny swirling shrimp, AKA Squid Bait

the surface enveloped by a very large Humboldt squid that must have been 4 feet long! When I shined the light around, I could see that 4 or 5 other "killer" squid surrounded us! The only thing missing from this scene was some organ music by Capt. Nemo.

Basically, we handled the situation with the grace and organization of *Laurel and Hardy* with a few scenes stolen from the *Three Stooges*. Fishing poles came out, lures attached ready to set sharp barbs deep into the waiting flesh of thumbs and pants. Gaff

hooks swung to sink their evil points into the menacing fiberglass hull, all while we were awash in ejected seawater and ink. We hooked one squid using an 8-inch long silicone fishing lure. It simply reduced the lure to a series of rubber patches interspersed with large v-shaped wounds. The squid proceeded to climb up the 100-pound test fishing line and unhook itself, before giving a baleful glare with its half dollar size eyes and jetting away. All in all, it was just about a perfect way to spend an evening with your brother. Our manly hunter instincts satisfied, we drifted off to sleep only occasionally troubled by scenes from *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*.

To Be Continued.....