

March 15, 2003

Greetings now from La Paz, Mexico. We are enjoying very much our stay here in La Paz. It is a most charming, clean, pleasant town with a very warm, laid-back atmosphere. There is no begging, and one feels very safe. The promenade along the shoreline is just beautiful to walk along. The sounds of roosters and church bells wake you in the morning. It would be very easy to linger here a while – and many cruisers do just that.

To recap from our last update, I must mention first more about our stay in Ensenada. To have been there on Carnival weekend (their version of Mardi Gras) was such an added bonus. The parade on Saturday afternoon, March 1, was so much fun with lots of colorful floats and music. Quite a festive atmosphere! Then, in the evening, we enjoyed again their Carnival. It was much livelier than Friday night with lots more people and music and many couples dancing in the streets. A fond memory of mine will always be watching a group of 4 to 5 people move along the streets, one behind the other, keeping time to the music as they tried to make their way through the crowds.

We departed Ensenada on Sunday, March 2, around 12:15 p.m. headed toward La Paz. The first 2½ hours were spent beating hard to windward as we crossed the bay (Bahia de Todos Santos) from Ensenada in order to clear the outer point (Cabo Punta Banda). We probably took more water across our rails in these 2½ hours than during the rest of the passage.

Our passage along the outside of the Baja Peninsula (almost 800 miles in length) can be divided into three legs. Our first leg was from Cabo Punta Banda to Isla Cedros. After clearing the point, we had a most beautiful downwind sail for the rest of the afternoon and evening, even having at times 1 to 1½ knots of favorable current. Were we moving! By midnight, though, we once again succumbed to motoring. It wasn't until the next day, Monday, March 4, around 4 p.m. that we started to sail once more, and then we sailed for most of the rest of the first leg. The winds were pretty consistent, fluctuating between 8 to 13 knots, and thus our boat speed oscillated back and forth between 4 to 6+ knots. The seas were moderate, and at times we had a favorable current of ½ knot. The nights were beautiful, full of lots of stars due to the new moon, but since the wind was coming generally from the NW, it was quite cold.

We sailed by the northern tip of Isla Cedros in the early afternoon of Tuesday, March 4. Because we were having such a great sail, we decided to go along the windward side of the island, thus hoping to keep our wind. The windward north side was steep and rugged with few trees on top. But, unfortunately, we lost most of our wind, and so had to motorsail in order to clear the southern end of the island before nightfall (the total length of the island being around 20 miles). (Note: If one ever looks at a map of the world, no matter how big or small, there is always one island that is shown along the western side of the Baja Peninsula, and that is Isla Cedros.)

Our second leg was from Isla Cedros to Bahia Santa Maria. After clearing Isla Cedros, we also needed to clear Isla Natividad before being once more free of land. It wasn't until around 1 a.m. on Wednesday, March 5, that we finally cleared that small last island. It ended up being a long night, especially for the captain, as there were many weather changes around Punta Eugenia – even had some squalls – plus no wind at times. But, by the time we were near Bahia Tortugas (one of the anchorages at which we thought we might stop – especially if we needed fuel, and we didn't), the winds were perfect, and so we decided to continue on. All Wednesday we sailed with winds mostly from the NW, 9 to 15 knots, with moderate seas. As the wind fluctuated slightly, so did the boat – and as we were sailing downwind that meant jibing about 4 to 6 times to keep us on track (quite a zigzag plot on the chart). Wednesday ended up being a gorgeous blue-sky day, and that night there were lots of stars out. Only 1 hour during the night did we have to motor.



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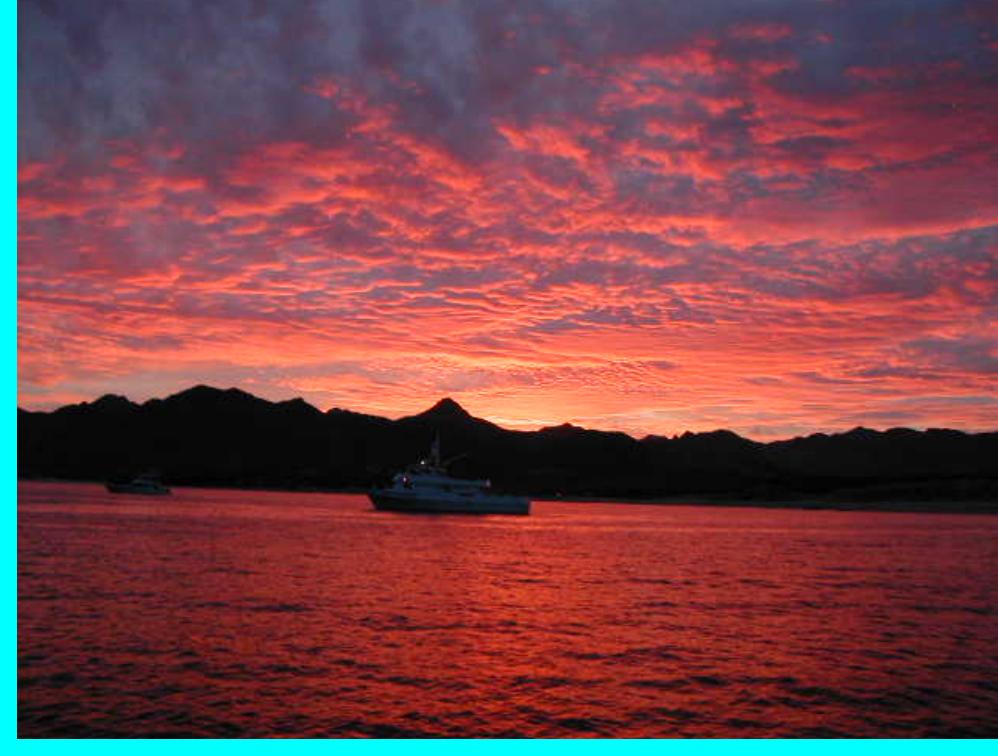
Thursday, March 6, was another beautiful day with not a single cloud in the sky. We sailed, then motored for about 6 hours until around 4 p.m., then sailed for another 4 hours, and then motored the rest of the way into Bahia Santa Maria where we were planning to put down our anchor for a couple of nights. Because the coastline in this leg was mostly low-lying, the headlands all looked like islands until we got closer. We could see Cabo San Lazaro about 30 miles away. Coming in at night into Bahia Santa Maria, just behind Cabo San Lazaro, was most exciting. The stars were out, and the illumination from the few small communities surrounding the area outlined the headland. Using GPS and radar, we navigated our way into the bay. You could hear, but not see, the surf off in the distance. In the olden days, with only a sextant, we would have had to wait until daylight to enter a new anchorage. We finally put down our anchor around 1 a.m.

Friday, March 7, was a layover rest day. Bahia Santa Maria was a very pleasant anchorage – peaceful – even with the winds howling at times. Cabo San Lazaro and the surrounding landscape were quite barren; one truly realized one was in a desert. There was a small fish camp off in the distance and sand dunes along the beach.

Our last leg along the western side of Baja was from Bahia Santa Maria to Cabo San Lucas. We pulled up our anchor at Bahia Santa Maria at 2:30 p.m. on Saturday, March 8, so that we would be approaching Cabo at first light on Monday. We passed the entrance into Bahia Magdalena (the last port to get fuel along the western side of Baja) around sunset, but again, since we had been able to sail quite a bit, there was no need to stop. This last leg we sailed off and on. The skies were mostly overcast. On Sunday afternoon, March 9, the cruise ship “Sun Princess” passed us headed north from Cabo. Around 5:45 p.m., we could see the light from the lighthouse at Cabo Falso, just north of Cabo San Lucas. We were making much better time than expected, especially with the help at times of a knot of current. Thus we arrived at Cabo ahead of schedule.

We rounded the famous rocks at Cabo San Lucas about 2 a.m. on Monday, March 10. In the calm of the night we approached the rocks from the west. The illumination from the city Cabo San Lucas silhouetted them so perfectly. Then, we slowly motored around the rocks, staying only about  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile off. As we rounded the rocks, the lights from the city highlighted them. It was truly breathtaking! We spent about an hour motoring slowly through the bay, only about  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile offshore. All the hotels had their lights on; so we could see everything quite well.

We followed the coastline, motoring about  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile offshore, up to Cabo los Frailes, about 45 miles from Cabo San Lucas. We were lucky that there was not much wind, as now the wind from the NW was not to our advantage. We stayed as close to shore as possible to keep out of the worst of the swell. As we traveled along the coast, we were amazed at the number of large houses (many could be classified as haciendas) out in the middle of nowhere. Also, it was amazing the dramatic difference in temperature once we turned the corner into the Sea of Cortez. We took off our sweatshirts and sweatpants and put on shorts and T-shirts. It was finally hot! We anchored in Bahia Frailes around noon on Monday, March 10.



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We pulled up our anchor at 5:45 a.m. on Tuesday, March 11, so as to take advantage of no wind early on in the day. It wasn't until noon that the winds finally came up from the NW. As we traveled north, about 2 miles offshore, the mountain range along the coast reminded us at times of the mountains surrounding the Los Angeles basin. We anchored at 2:15 p.m. at the northern end of Bahia de los Muertos, about 45 miles from our last anchorage, in beautiful clear turquoise water. We could see the bottom at 30 feet. There were large cacti along the headland.

On Wednesday, March 12, we pulled up our anchor at first light (5 a.m.) as we had 58 miles to go to La Paz. Another beautiful day! We motorsailed most of the day as we had a schedule to keep. At times we had south winds, then north winds. The landscape was very much a desert. We anchored in La Paz at 2:45 p.m. and changed our clocks one hour ahead to Mountain Time.

We anchored for two nights in the bay at La Paz and are presently moored at Marina de La Paz. Our present plan is to depart La Paz on Tuesday, March 18, headed out first to the nearby islands – then north to a few other islands – before sailing across the Sea of Cortez to Mazatlan, arriving there on or before the first of April.



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Kuhela anchored at La Paz