

Greetings from **Ehrenberg**, Arizona. We are camped here in Ehrenberg on the banks of the Colorado River about 18 miles west of Quartzsite, Arizona. When last you heard from us, we were getting ready to leave the Palm Springs area.

So on December 18 we left Palm Springs, drove down the west side of the **Salton Sea** and into **Yuma**, Arizona. Yuma has to be the RV capital of the world. Everywhere you look, there is grey hair, RV sales, RV parks, and RVs. Fuel, propane, and water are all much cheaper than in California. The weather is also nice in the winter. Other than that, we couldn't figure out why the old RVers go there. We didn't see a whole lot of natural beauty or special tourist attractions.

We went to Yuma primarily to visit the **Sewmasters** factory which custom makes sun shades for the windows. It was a good stop. We parked in their parking lot the night before and at 8 o'clock the next morning, they went to work and built us a windshield cover and shades for several other windows. We are happy to recommend this company. They do good work at a reasonable price.

After the shades were done, we spent one night at Pilot Knob RV Park in **Winterhaven**, California. This was just a staging area for our trip into Mexico.

December 20 we left Winterhaven and headed for **Calexico**, California to buy Mexican insurance and to be able to ride the motorcycle across the border to Mexicali to get tourist cards. That was two mistakes. It would have been much easier to walk across the border, and as it turned out, you don't need tourist cards to visit Northern Baja or the mainland state of Sonora. While in Calexico, we shopped for a good rate of exchange and bought \$200 worth of pesos. That turned out to be a good idea. We got 10.75 pesos per dollar whereas the stores, restaurants, and vendors in Mexico will only exchange 10 pesos per dollar. So armed with insurance, pesos, and tourist cards, we drove to **El Centro** for the night and hooked up with **Bob & Bonnie Moyer** who graciously agreed to store our revolver. **Under no circumstances do you ever want to take a firearm or ammunition into Mexico. It is an extremely serious offense.**

As luck would have it, the El Centro park (Desert Trails RV Park) has a guided caravan every Wednesday morning from the park directly to **San Felipe, Baja**. Wow, what a break! It was Wednesday and that's where we were going. So we hooked up with the caravan and went with them. That really worked well because it's not easy finding your way through Mexicali. The caravan takes you directly to a high end American park which is there primarily as a land development sales group. We took the sales tour to get a couple of free dinners and a reduced rate on our parking. It was amazing how many people are building houses there. The land development and the RV park is called **El Dorado Ranch** which encompasses 135,000 acres. The very cheapest lot you could buy is about \$9,000 for a 100x100 ft. lot with no improvements, no water, no septic tank, and no electricity now or in the future. They call these solar lots. It looked nuts to us, but they're selling a lot of them.

We stayed 6 nights at San Felipe which is on the east side of the Baja peninsula right on the Sea of Cortez. Sunrises across the Sea of Cortez are fabulous every morning.

The water is clear, warm, beautiful, and teeming with fish, clams, and shrimp. Nope, the Sea of Cortez does not have lobsters. If you want lobsters, go down Baja, but stay on the Pacific Ocean side. The Sea of Cortez is absolutely beautiful and should not be missed based on unfounded fear of banditos and Federales. **We'd like to offer Chuck's cousin, Paul, a special thanks for sharing his extensive knowledge of Baja with us.**



**Chuck on the water's edge in downtown San Felipe**



**Looking at the Sea of Cortez from El Dorado Ranch RV Resort**



### Downtown San Felipe

San Felipe is definitely worth a visit. It's only a few hours drive on reasonably good paved roads from the border at Calexico. El Centro is a good place to start from and if you drive 55 miles per hour and take a long lunch break, you'll make the trip in less than 4 hours.

After 6 days in San Felipe we decided to see the Sea of Cortez from the other side of the water. Well, we could have gone back to El Centro, California and then headed for Yuma, Arizona, and crossed into mainland Mexico at San Luis, Arizona. But against local advice we decided to just go north in Baja and then cut through the Mexican farm land around the north end of the Sea of Cortez. That turned out to be a good decision. We saved two border crossings, a lot of miles and got to see quite a bit of rural Mexican farm land. It was fun and interesting to avoid all of the usual U.S. tourists. So we went around the Sea of Cortez and then headed south for the town of **Golfo de Santa Clara**. It was an easy trip and only took us about 4 hours total from San Felipe to Golfo.

There is plenty of very rustic camping at Golfo, as well as free spots on the beach. We had reservations, however, at El Golfo RV Resort which is part of the RPI RV resort chain and only cost us \$8 a night with full hookups and all of the amenities. We could only get reservations for 3 nights because the resort was very full between Christmas and New Years. El Golfo is very much worth seeing! From El Golfo, you see the sun set over the Sea of Cortez. Life doesn't get much better. Sunrises at San Felipe, sunsets in El Golfo...what a great way to spend the Christmas holidays.



**Chuck on a rented quad at El Golfo**



**Donna on the beach at El Golfo**



### **El Golfo RV Resort**

San Felipe and Golfo de Santa Clara are completely different from one another. While San Felipe is a fishing town, it is primarily a tourist destination. Everything along the beach is aimed at tourists. It is full of restaurants, bars, nightclubs, and little shops full of tourist souvenirs. It attracts a young U.S. crowd devoted to serious partying. It also attracts an older crowd of RVers who are interested in fishing, soaking up the sun, and eating their weight in shrimp.

Golfo, on the other hand, is a sleepy little fishing village with only a few restaurants and bars and almost no amenities. The El Golfo RV Resort, however, has a very devoted clientele of older RV couples who come every year and bring their toys. Just about every RV has at least one quad and most have two or more. This is also the land of the hot VW sand rail. Everybody rides their quads everywhere. In front of the resort is a beautiful beach that can be reached right from your RV. Likewise, right behind the resort are mountains and sand dunes with all terrain vehicle paths everywhere. If you want to go downtown, you ride your toys right through the paved streets of downtown, all four blocks of it. As long as you stop at stop signs and don't exceed speed limits, you can ride your unlicensed off road vehicles anywhere. Wow, it's really freaky to ride an unlicensed ATV through town and have the cops smile and wave at you. Even hopped up and very loud sand rails are welcome downtown.

Was it safe and would we do it again? We would go again in a heartbeat. Was it dangerous? Absolutely not. We have heard all sorts of horror stories primarily from people who have never been to Mexico. The folks that do go do it over and over again and love it! But, what about the RV inspections to get into Mexico? For the most part, most rigs are not inspected going into Mexico. The Mexicans want U.S. dollars and generally just wave you through. What about the Federales (military checkpoints)? For the most part, they don't care about your entry into Mexico either. Do these soldiers look like they're 12 years old and carry machine guns? No, they look about the same age as our soldiers and don't carry machine guns. At an inspection station, there may be a dozen or so Federales with perhaps two of them carrying old military rifles and the rest unarmed.

What is interesting is that the Federale checkpoints are far more likely to inspect your car and/or RV when you are leaving Mexico. Why is that? We don't know, but can't help wondering if the U.S. is not subsidizing the Federales to look for drugs.

In general, we found the Mexican Federales to be reasonable and courteous. Overall, we liked dealing with the Federales much more than dealing with the U.S. Border Patrol. The Federales expect you to observe their search. They don't mind when you accompany them into the coach. Whatever

they touch and whatever cupboards they open, they carefully put everything back the way it was. The stops are also quick and you're on your way. The U.S. Border Patrol, on the other hand, is slow and inefficient and you can wait in line for one to two hours. If they elect to search your rig, they throw you out when they do it. It's easy to tell what they looked at, however, since they don't put anything back the way they found it.

Hey, but what about the crazy Mexican drivers? It is true that many Mexicans are driving run down cars and trucks, many with some of the lights out. However, they tend not to speed as they are quite interested in saving fuel. On the other hand, the road between San Felipe and Mexicali was full of Americans driving like maniacs trying to squeeze in as much fun as a weekend would allow. All in all, we would not drive at night because of the poorly lit Mexican vehicles, but in general the Mexicans did not pose the threat that the U.S. drivers did.

Annika loves Mexico. She loves the beaches and constantly searched for souvenir sea gull and pelican feathers. She loved the Sea of Cortez as the water is warm and shallow for a long way out. It was the perfect location for a dog swim. There were plenty of clams on the beach of San Felipe, but she didn't find clam digging to be interesting. A soggy, sandy dog with a big smile was pretty much a daily occurrence. Oh, and one other thing. Dogs are permitted in restaurants everywhere we went. Talk about an enlightened country. Annika went out to lunch a couple of times and was very impressed. Although she had her current rabies certificate, no authority ever asked to see it.

For us the only deterrent to spending lots of time on the Sea of Cortez is the problem of communicating with our customers. There are lots of spots where the cell phones and computers don't work. Well, okay, the food did get a little boring. We bought a kilo (2.2 lbs.) of shrimp right off the boat for \$10. We put it in tacos, shrimp cocktails, sautéed with onions and garlic, shrimp Louies and ate them for appetizers. Yes, that's right, paradise is not as easy as it first looks.

Until next time, home is where we park it.

Chuck & Donna