

# **Our Log of The Sea of Cortez**

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**June 2023**

*Neumann, Popov*

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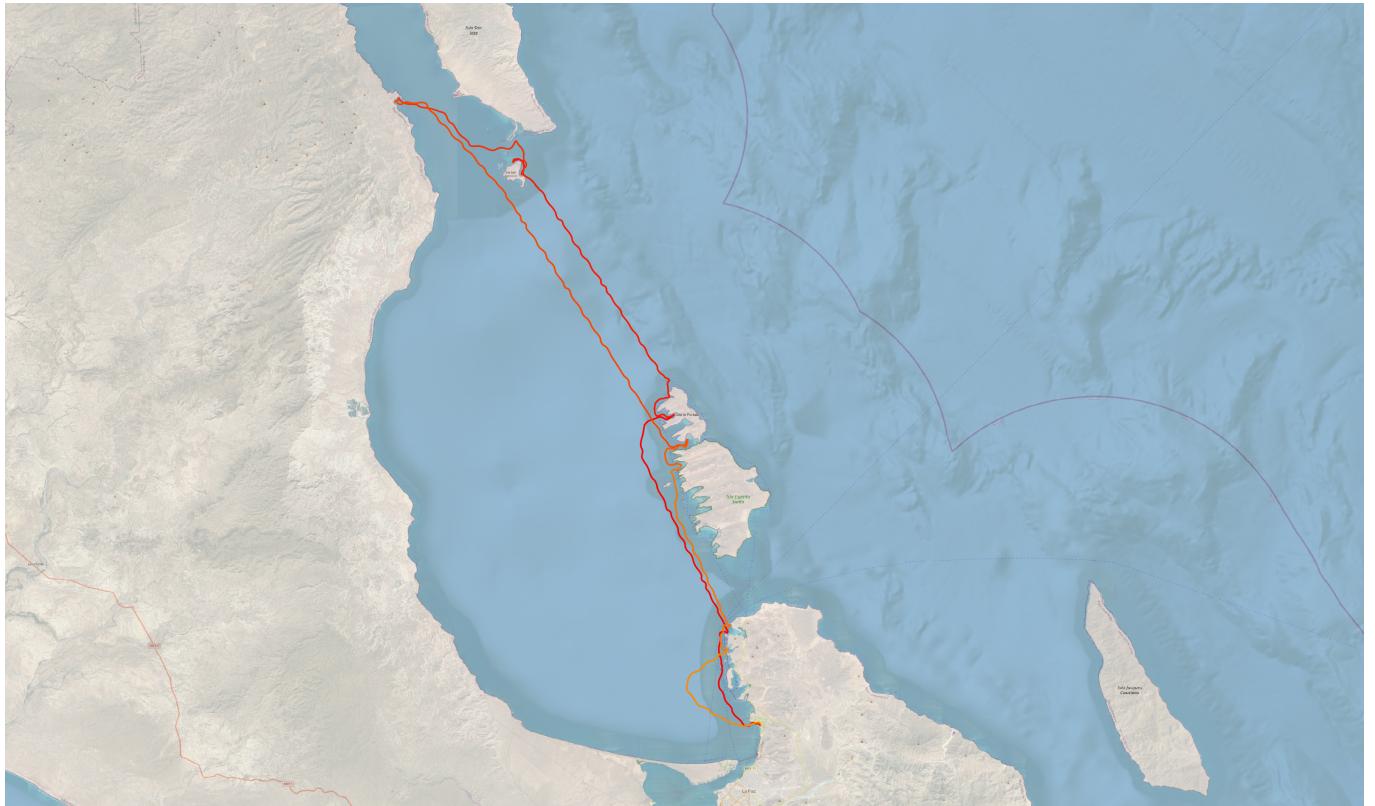
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## 1. Our Log of The Sea of Cortez (June 2023)

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In June 2023, our two families, Neumann and Popov, endeavor an adventure together at sea. We spend 7 days sailing the Sea of Cortez onboard *Grieg*, a 46-foot Dufour sloop. We sail a loop from the southern point of La Paz to the northern point of San Evaristo and back. We enjoy Father's Day and Summer Solstice at sea and visit coastal towns of Baja California Sur and the jewels of Isla Partida, Isla San Francisco, Isla San Jose, and Isla Espiritu Santo. Our intrepid crew:

- Michael (50)
- Amy (47)
- Zarko (43)
- Magdalena (40)
- Tobias (12)
- Asher (10)
- Aleksandar (10)
- Maksim (5)



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**Baja California Sur**

## 2. La Paz: 16 June 2023

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### 2.1 Route

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Location	Latitude	Longitude
Mission Viejo, CA, USA	33.563 N	117.658 W
Tijuana, BC, MEX	32.541 N	116.970 W
La Paz, BCS, MEX	24.162 N	110.315 W

### 2.2 Journal

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Today, Friday, we flew from Tijuana to La Paz, a 2 hour flight. We transited the US/ Mexico border via the Cross-Border Express, a marbled, air-conditioned, pedestrian bridge, which facilitates seamless entry to Mexico and the Tijuana Airport. An easy 7 minute walk and you've moved from the United States of America to the United Mexican States. Our adventure begins.

The landing was terrifying as, on approach, the pilot dipped the port wing at low speed and low altitude, plane sliding sideways through the air toward the quickly approaching ground. The pilot corrects, leveling the plane, heavy throttle, and climbing into the air for a second attempt, which was passable, bringing us to La Paz.

We quickly move through the two-gate airport. Within 30 minutes we have collected, and piled, our gear into the manual-transmission Nissan Urvan and are trundling along the pocked highway and residential streets toward our lodgings. Landscape is remarkably similar to Egyptian Red Sea, coastal Yemen, and coastal Jordan with sparsely vegetated, rocky desert, running directly to crystal coastal waters bound by blue sea.

After a quick-ish stop at Walmart to gather basic supplies for Saturday breakfast and lunch, we are winding our way through the neighborhoods of La Paz. It is not too long before we revert to 2nd-world driving mode, where traffic laws and signs are merely suggestions. We begin to make good time to Nahuala Home. After receiving some local guidance, we locate the correct address and are home for the night.

Nahuala Home is a dormant hostel, out of service with the end of the spring high-season. We have the entire facility to ourselves. As with any hostel, the floorplan is a mix of communal space optimized for socialization, and awkwardly configured living and bathroom space. We are happy to have the facility to ourselves but wonder about the abundance of internal security cameras. The interior core is delightfully air conditioned. Boys select a room with many bunk beds.

We enjoy a fine meal at *La Peregrina*. As a saxophone player serenades us in the bistro-light strung courtyard, we begin to settle into the holiday and all comment about our contentedness in this moment. After dinner we walk on the La Paz Malecon before a good night's slumber in anticipation of boarding the boat.



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**Baja California Sur**

## 3. La Paz: 17 June 2023

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### 3.1 Route

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Location	Latitude	Longitude
La Paz, BCS, MEX	24.162 N	110.315 W

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### 3.2 Journal

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Early morning, I (Michael) take the boys for some area familiarization, a favorite activity of mine on Day 1 of any new place. Typically, few people are out and you can quickly survey a city for core needs, locations, and areas of concern. We zip through La Paz, good to drive a manual transmission vehicle, and locate several banks, the core business district with shops and restaurants, and identify key north-south and east-west thoroughfares. We visit an ATM to get Mexican Pesos and make a stop at the local dive shop to arrange our scuba adventure. The dive shop visit spawns additional stops at several marine and camping supply outlets as we attempt, successfully, to replace the dive weights that were confiscated at the Tijuana Airport.

We return to Nahuala Home. Zarko has discovered the cafe on the first floor with delicious pastries. The adults take to the back garden with a peek-a-boo view of the sea. Kids engage in card games as we await boarding time, which is supposed to be 17:00. We decide to ignore checkout time and see if anyone arrives to make us vacate. At 11:00, the marina calls and informs us we can board the boat at 14:00 and that we should come to the marina to complete paperwork and receive familiarization and safety briefing at 13:00. It's on. After some quesadillas, we pile our gear and crew back into the Urvan and we're speeding along the *Malecon* and into the coastal range of La Paz, headed to Marina CostaBaja.

After some confusion and broken-spanish consultation with locals, we locate CostaBaja Marina. We subsequently traverse the car-park several times, unnecessarily triggering excessive backing of the Urvan, AKA tactical driving, before we locate a viable parking spot. It is hot. The charter office is small and air conditioned. Some of our crew wait aboard the boat, some play on the dock, and some absorb the familiarization and safety briefing. We then disaggregate, and load, our gear onto *Grieg*, our 46 foot charter boat. She seems big. We chug some water. It is really, really, hot. We again pile into the Urvan, destined for Walmart to procure 7 days worth of provisions.

We decide to take the inland route, which loops through the coastal range and into the desert outskirts of La Paz. The landscape is beautiful, rocky, dotted with cactus. As we approach the outskirts of the city, small settlements and houses punctuate the landscape. Hard to imagine this life, but we try to initiate conversation with the kids about it anyway. It passes in a blur. This is part of our time here: noticing how people live life differently, appreciating those differences, and reflecting on our, very different, reality. We, ultimately, connect to the main highway and are bound for Walmart.

We park and enter the massive store, looking exactly as you would expect any Walmart, and then split into several groups to try and attack, as fast as we can, the problem of buying provisions for 8 people, for 7 days. It's a bit chaotic, we manage it in 2 hours, consuming food and drink as we seek, find, and procure our stores. Food and crew fill the van and we speed back to the boat to unload and enjoy a night in the marina. Live music streams from the cantina as we unload, eat rotisserie chicken and tortillas, and settle into our new home *Grieg*.

Indicator purchases:

- 120 liters of water in 6 liter jugs (20)
- 54 eggs
- 2 pounds butter
- 1 gallon milk
- 4 loafs of bread
- 20 bananas
- 6 pounds of pasta
- 48 tortillas
- 12 hamburger paties
- 4 Beyond Meat hamburgers
- 15 hotdogs
- 1 liter orange juice
- 1 case of Tecate beer
- 16 bottles of wine; mixed red, white, rose
- 1 bottle vodka (750 ml)
- 1 bottle dark rum (750 ml)
- 1 gallon Clamato, inclusion of which causes heated debate
- 32 soft drinks
- 10 novelty ice creams, which immediatley melt
- 2 quarts ice cream, around which we curate a glacial ecosystem
- 25 kilograms of ice



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Baja California Sur      Isla Partida

## 4. Ensenada Grande: 18 June 2023

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### 4.1 Route

Location	Latitude	Longitude
La Paz, BCS, MEX	24.214 N	110.299 W
Estero Balandra, BCS, MEX	24.316 N	110.335 W
Ensenada Grande, BCS, MEX	24.560 N	110.396 W

### 4.2 Journal

Today, Sunday, we set sail on our charter boat *Grieg* at 10:30 from La Paz into the Sea of Cortez. We motored out of La Paz to Estero Balandra via Caleta Lobos, anchoring in a sandy bottom in Estero Balandra for some swimming, snorkeling, and adventuring in the dinghy. After several hours in Estero Bay, and a brief motor-sail, we raised sail and struck a course for Ensenada Grande on Isla Partida, arriving and setting anchor at 16:35. Winds running 15 to 20 knots out of the southeast.

Good snorkeling in Estero Balandra with a variety of sealife, most striking a small school of cow-head rays, and an underwater swim through that Michael and Tobias found and navigated that had 300 to 700 fish. Insane as we swam through, the fish fleeing in panic thinking we were large predators. Open debate ensues of whether it is more fun to swim with the school or into, opposite direction, of the school.

We lose connectivity 10 nautical miles out of La Paz and all screens are dead for the remainder of the trip. New neural pathways begin development.

Excellent snorkeling in Ensenada Grande where Amy, Magda, Tobias, Aleks, and Asher explore the small fisherman's cove on the south side of the anchorage. Notably see: large school of needle fish, coral, puffer fish, rays. Sea turtles, frigate birds, and pelicans throughout the bay.

After battling, and finally accepting, waves of bees, sunset finds us piled into the dinghy floating near the beach amid a massive bait-ball of tens-of-thousands of small fish. Scores of Brown Pelicans skim the water, floating on the breeze before driving into the sky, reversing and dive-bombing into the bait for their evening meal. We float silently amid the swirling bait-ball, so close to the pelican strikes that we hear the wind whistle through their feathers as they fold wings just before striking water and their prey. We chuckle in amazement that we are here to experience this ritual.

Nightime, we spend a lifetime trying to get the grill hot before enjoying a delicious meal of hamburgers. As the breeze builds through the evening, stoking the grill, we suddenly need to douse the flames because of flying embers. Filling a wine bottle full of seawater to dump on the hot coals, we discover something magical, sparkling, and enchanting: bioluminescence. Swirling our hands through the water, the bioluminescent plankton illuminate, leaving a trail of glowing sea-foam like embers.

**Aleks:** I had a really fun day, excited to see rays and puffer fishes. Surprised by the number of rays.

**Asher:** I had an amazing day seeing lots of fish. Amazingly clear water, amazing scenery, bright fish that I really enjoyed.

**Tobias:** Super cool and fun day, clear water, lots of coral, surprising large number of puffer fish.

As the boys go to bed, the wind continues to build and we garner our first experience with *The Coromuel*:

- *Coromuel:* Strong winds that begin in the evening and blow through the night, created by cool air from the Pacific Ocean flowing across the low land of the Baja Peninsula towards the warmer waters of the Sea of Cortez. South to Southwesterly.

Zarko and Michael spend the night on, rotating, 2.5 hour anchor watches.

#### 4.2.1 Anchor Watch

**00:27, 19 June 2023**

Swining on the hook again, wind waves lapping our hull in 4 fathoms, stars above, and ink blackness surrounding. I (Michael) am sitting the second-shift anchor-watch as a 20 knot, gusty, wind buffets our boat, swinging us on a 90 degree arch. We've come to the Sea of Cortez and this is our first night out of La Paz. This has been one helluva Father's Day. Thankful for all the monements that have brought me here.

Our transit from the US to La Paz, Mexico, can be characterized by an easy 7 minute walk from the United States of America to the United Mexican States. It is a short distance across an invisible boundary, but the change is real. Observing the people in the airport, and the passengers on the flight, I was struck by the differnences of morphology, clothing, tone, and demeanor of the populous when compared to the citizens on the US side of the border. In this hyper-connected world where nearly all things flow freely, how can there be such a distinct differnce of demographics in such little distance? It seems the natural diffusion of culture, genes, and ethos should create a more homogeneous distribution. This dicontinuity becomes even more of a paradox when we purchase a carton of blue-berries in La Paz, Mexico, that are the same as the ones we purchase in Mission Viejo, California. How can commodities be *identical* over a vast distance, while people and culture have a marked discontinuity over a mostly permeable and permissive border? It seems human existence and condition should be more homogenous, more evenly distributed, over space and time.

Winds continue to build. I had read about Coromuels in pilot guides. Steinbeck dedicates some words to them. I didn't expect "evening" to translate to 21:30, and didn't expect to contend with them on night one out of port. Poor choice of anchorage given the description for Ensenada Grande: "With the anchorage open to the southwest, little protection is available during periods of night time coromuel winds." Swinging in darkness.

**01:23**

Wind may be begining to slack, going forward to the bow to gaze upon the Milky Way.

**06:07**

Sun just begining to crest the valley-ridge of the large beach in Ensenada Grande. Frigate birds and pelicans are using the sun's oblique angle to hunt their morning meal, lofting on the southwestern breeze and then plunging into the water to scoop a meal.



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**Isla Partida**      **Isla San Francisco**

## 5. Isla San Francisco: 19 June 2023

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### 5.1 Route

Location	Latitude	Longitude
Ensenada Grande, BCS, MEX	24.560 N	110.396 W
Caleta El Embudo, BCS, MEX	24.581 N	110.398 W
Los Islotes, BCS, MEX	24.598 N	110.401 W
Isla San Francisco (North), BCS, MEX	24.842 N	110.575 W
Isla San Francisco (East), BCS, MEX	24.829 N	110.566 W

### 5.2 Journal

Technically, the day starts extremely early with anchor watches from the first minutes of 19 June through to the dawn. The sunrise paints a pastel beginning, dark forms of frigate birds and pelicans moving through the sky hunting bait fish. After re-positioning *Grieg*, ceding apparently valuable territory to the bees and wasps, we head for the shore. Michael, Amy, Magda, Maks, Aleks, Tobias, and Asher take the dinghy to the main beach of Ensenada Grande. Michael and Amy undertake a short hike up the main canyon which provides a postcard view of the valley, beach, and anchorage. Magda and boys enjoy the beach, snorkeling, and exploring the shallow cove. Upon returning from the hike, we notice thousands of small fiddler-crabs along the lagoon-land interface. The boys then spend an hour herding the crabs and exploring the lagoon. A small number of blue crabs are present in the lagoon, angry as always.

As we depart for Isla San Francisco, no wind means a motor-sail with hopes of a building breeze. We make an impromptu stop in Caleta El Embudo, which wildly exceeds expectations with a bed of thousands of Cortez Garden Eels swaying on the bottom, retreating as we dive to inspect. Many, many, varied fish which we try to remember and compare to our laminated marine-life illustration card. After pulling the anchor from sandy bottom of Caleta El Embudo, we motorsail around Los Islotes to visit the sea-lion rookery and then onto Isla San Francisco. Little to no wind keeps us under motor and gives Asher and Aleks an opportunity to lounge in the main-sail. We opt to head to the north end of Isla San Francisco to explore the lagoon, Tobias hoping to find a hammer-head shark nursery. Aleks and Asher undertake some "*Navy Seal Training*" hanging off the side of the dinghy as we speed to shore. The lagoon is heavily brackish and seems to not have regular exchange. Isla San Francisco presents a stunning landscape, rising from the sea.

Given our experience the previous night with *The Coromuel*, we opt to anchor on the east side of Isla San Francisco for the night. Swimming and jumping off the bow ensues as Zarko wrangles the grill into submission and production of heat. Before sunset we survey the bay to scout for viable night snorkeling locations, which, after dinner, yields a first-time night snorkel for Tobias, Amy, and Magda. Under the glow of the Milky-Way we see varied fish, many large puffer fish, large spotted box fish, bobbit worm, and 2 surly green eels, which simultaneously leave us in awe and strike fear. Asher, Aleks, Maks, and Zarko learn the difference between fishing and catching, losing several large fish and breaking a rod before landing a Cortez Grunt. The anchorage is filled with bioluminescence; the sea mimicing the sky with swirling constellations of light.



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Isla San Francisco    Isla San Jose    Baja California Sur

## 6. San Evaristo: 20 June 2023

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### 6.1 Route

Location	Latitude	Longitude
Isla San Francisco (East), BCS, MEX	24.829 N	110.566 W
Isla San Jose, La Amortajada, BCS, MEX	24.868 N	110.570 W
San Evaristo, BCS, MEX	24.913 N	110.702 W

### 6.2 Journal

In the morning, wind fresh and building from the north, we motor, wind on the nose to La Amortajada, a mangrove-forest lagoon encircled and protected by a massive sand-spit. Enroute we spot jumping Dorado propelling their turquoise-yellow-green masses out of the water, either in pursuit of prey or being pursued as prey. We arrive to La Amortajada on a flooding tide and take the dinghy in 2 shifts to explore the mangrove forest, Neumann Family on Trip 1, Popov Family on Trip 2.

Inside the sand-spit bastion lies a vast mangrove ecosystem ranging from clear sand-bottom shallows to dense mangroves cut with tidal channels through which silty and tannic dark waters flow. We see many sea turtles, unidentified fish, rays, potential baby hammer-head sharks, sea birds and raptors.

Neumann Family arrives at the opening of the lagoon during a strong flood-tide, channel unnavigable with no depth, water heavily rushing over a rocky bottom as the morning exchange with the sea begins. Michael, Amy, Asher, and Tobias exit the dinghy and drag the tender across the rocks and into the lagoon, then falling into the deep drop-off just inside the entrance. We scramble back into the boat and explore the mangroves sometimes under power, sometimes drifting silently under paddle, or walking slowly in sand-bottom, or silty-muck bottom, pulling the dinghy. On our return to *Grieg*, exiting the lagoon is equally chaotic as the flood tide is still strong and water depth not navigable. We slightly miss-time the exit from the dinghy to walk it across the lagoon entrance and in the seconds of miss-timing Asher and Tobias exit the bow, Amy and Michael off the stern into shoulder deep, rushing water, that renders us useless in moving the dinghy and threatens to sweep us back into the lagoon. Mild panic ensues and the boat also begins to be swept back into the lagoon. Asher and Tobias have to pull the dinghy, Amy and Michael holding on, to a point that all can work to move the boat through the entrance. It is slow going as the under-powered dinghy struggles against the flood. We believe we spot juvenile hammer heads also transiting the entrance.

During Trip 1, local fisherman approach *Grieg* in a panga and ask the Popov Family for some water, they share a 6 liter jug, a precious commodity for us on a boat in 100-degree temperatures. The fisherman retreat to shore and the shade of foliage along the crest of the sand-spit, seeking refuge from the scorching temperatures and strong north winds.

As we leave La Amortajada, on our way to the fishing village of San Evaristo, the wind is gusting above 20 knots from the north. We again motorsail, wind on the nose.

We tuck into the northern lobe of the bay and anchor in sandy bottom in 3 fathoms of water. There is a large white cross at the top of the steep hill engulfing the cove. Maybe it is a reminder of colonial history, maybe a symbol of protection for the fishermen, and not the only one we would encounter. We enjoy afternoon swimming and snorkeling with decent visibility of 20 feet, various fish, among rocky bottom interspersed with sand. Asher hones his diving skill hunting for shells.

We discover a large grass hopper lounging on our bimini and name him *Pin*. We wonder how long he has been transiting, could he have been a co-resident with us from La Paz? We carefully move around him as to not scare him into the water, and then decide it is best to release him on land. Tobias spearheads plans to hold him in a container and make a trip to shore to release him.

**17:05**

Mild panic ensues as the continuous running water pump, and gurgling sound of an empty water tank, alerts us to the fact that we have exhausted half our water supply in 3 days. We switch to the second tank, and thankfully realize we can take the dinghy into the only town on our itinerary, or really anywhere, to scrounge for water. We first re-inflate and restructure the plastic water bottles we have been crushing and storing as we use our potable water supply, it is, afterall, Mexico, which means one must only drink bottled water. Then, off we go into the fishing village of San Evaristo in search of water, paced by the sputtering engine of the dinghy; Michael, Zarko, and Tobias, with 6, 6-liter, empty plastic jugs. Upon arrival, there are kids of all ages playing soccer. Here, again, is a reminder that people around the world live differently, but also the same! After some conversation with the kids on the beach to convey our need, we meet Augustino, local fisherman,

who happily shares water. Karmic loop, given the water we shared with the fishermen earlier in the day. An hour later we are headed back to *Grieg* with 6, full, 6-liter jugs, and a 40-liter carboy that we have borrowed from our new local fisherman friend. Tobias releases Pin. An hour after that, we have partially filled *Grieg's* watertank, forced 200 pesos into the hand of Augustino, and parted with 2 bottles of wine for his deeply human kindness to share one of his most precious assets in this extreme desert environment. Deep thanks for the kindness of this human, an interesting full circle moment as we have today shared the precious commodity of water and received a ten-fold kindness.

**20:17**

Our first moon-rise of the trip presents as a waxing yellow-orange crescent accompanied by Jupiter rising over the encircling, rocky, hills. It sets equally beautifully and, as the boat swings, comes back into view gracing us with a second moon-set. Another windy night at anchor, and our trust in the rode and anchor is beginning to build. As darkness spreads, bioluminescence fills the bay.



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## 7. Caleta Partida: 21 June 2023

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### 7.1 Route

Location	Latitude	Longitude
San Evaristo, BCS, MEX	24.913 N	110.702 W
Caleta Partido, BCS, MEX	24.533 N	110.380 W

### 7.2 Journal

The day starts with a burst as Amy, Magda, and Zarko spot a school of mobula rays launching out of the water. The action triggers chaos as Michael and the boys move rapidly to don snorkel gear. As the rays breach their way across the cove, they pass the bow and we launch off the stern in pursuit. The rays escape our interaction but several breach and land within 15 to 20 feet of us. Later, debate ensues as to why the rays breach and we subsequently learn they breach to show off for a potential mate, get rid of parasites, or communicate, not in pursuit of bait-fish as originally thought.

After the excitement of the chase, Amy, Zarko, Magda, Maks, Aleks, and Asher take the dinghy into the village of San Evaristo to purchase fresh fish from Augustino. Tobias and Michael wrangle the anchor aboard and move the boat closer to the village for a hot-boat pick-up. A mobula ray nearly lands on the swim-step as we hold the boat for the shore crew. In the village, the crew giggles as Augustino's dogs chase one another, entering and exiting the small surf. Asher says they are the Mexican version of Hmfis and Fig. The dark female is very wary of us and keeps her distance, while the spotted male is happy to receive scratches and lean on the human volunteer. Zarko, Amy, and Magda purchase fresh Conchita from Augustino, possibly the Cortez Sea Chub. Augustino offers his daughter's ceviche preparation skill if we can wait an hour and a half. We have a long sail ahead and opt for a future return for fresh ceviche.

We manage a hot-boat transfer of the shore crew from the dinghy and depart San Evaristo at 10:17 under a north wind of 10 to 15 knots, and building. Our destination lies 32 nautical miles south, which Tobias has determined the day before via chart, compass, and parallel rule. We raise sail and run downwind, wing and wing, sea and wind building through the day.

Amy and Magda join the Mariners' Club, alongside Tobias, learning the art of navigation, determining and plotting our position, and charting our course as we run to Isla Partida.

The dinghy earns a name, *Griegito Conchito*, as we watch it surf and bob along as we tow it behind us in 20 knots of winds and 3 foot seas.

In the early afternoon, winds are gusting to 25 knots and seas running out of the north at 3 to 6 feet, lifting our stern rhythmically. As we settle in the trough of a deep roll, we spot a large manta ray surfing our direction, we attempt to chase the massive creature downwind, without success. On our final approach to Caleta Partida we spot dolphins off the port bow, and, as soon as we see them, they are gone. We again spot them to our stern, their large bodies and slow movement lead us to believe they may be Rizzo's Dolphins. We are on anchor in sand bottom by 15:30.

The shallows of Caleta Partida are replete with turtles, rays, bait fish, and sea birds. We spot an eagle ray and each family spots schools of rays and turtles as they take *Griegito Conchito* through the cut between Isla Partida and Isla Espiritu Santo, which provides a corridor to the open Sea of Cortez. We take a few moments to explore the shallows and coarse white-sand beach that provides a buttress between the islands. It is paradise in the warm water where we even dig up a few tiny clams for inspection.

Winds continue unabated through the night, blasting through the cut, and we jerkily swing on the anchor in 15 to 20 knots of wind, gusting to 25 knots. Another night of light sleep as we listen for the anchor alarm, we are now in full trust of the anchor and rode. We enjoy Amy's bespoke Sangria and dine on the fresh fish from Augustino, pan fried, on a bed of pasta and salsa of artichokes, garlic, onions, and tomatoes. The boys enjoy a movie and consume the last of the ice cream we have packed in ice in the cool-box.

Happy Summer Solstice.



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**Isla Espiritu Santo**

## 8. Ensedada Candelero: 22 June 2023

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### 8.1 Route

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Location	Latitude	Longitude
Caleta Partido, BCS, MEX	24.533 N	110.380 W
Ensenada Candelero, BCS, MEX	24.505 N	110.387 W

### 8.2 Journal

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In the morning, Michael and Tobias are picked up in a 24-foot panga by a local scuba diving guide and head to a wreck and island for 2 scuba dives.

Amy, Magda, Zarko, Asher, Aleks and Maks prepare to explore the local reef, which juts out from a cactus-laden rock island which is the inspiration for the name of the cove, El Candelero. *Griegito Conchito* delivers the crew to a small mooring where we tie up and swim to the tiny beach, obviously interrupting the gulls taking up residence there. We snorkel around the peninsula-like reef, another aquarium-like experience. Asher is working hard on his free diving abilities and is proud to present Mum with a sunset-themed shell.

After gathering supplies back on *Grieg*, the same crew heads to the beach for some badminton and beach play. Asher and Maks create a small sand fortress for fiddler crabs, while the others take turns in and out of the water at a leisurely pace. Amy spies a familiar boat heading into the cove, one that provided some heated discussion the night before, as the group there, flying an American flag, provided more nighttime light pollution than any other vessel seen. Today, the boat seems to be heading much too fast right toward the projecting reef. Sure enough, there's an abrupt stop, reversal, and quick getaway, their proverbial tail between their legs, and potentially punctured hull. This provides further topic of evaluation and discussion, some amusement and also disgust. Then, Amy and Magda enjoy a shallow jacuzzi spa in the sun-warmed lagoon waters before departing back to rejoin Michael and Tobias on *Grieg*.

In the late afternoon, the Neumann four return to the beach, southern lobe, to explore the lagoon, largely drained and evaporated from earlier in the day, when Michael exclaims the unexpected: "I hear a goat." Sure enough, we stop to listen to the distant calls and make our way toward the sound. Eventually we spy about 12 goats, including young ones, heading away from us and up the steep, harsh, terracotta hued rock, as only goats can. A few stay low and begin to drink, which makes us wonder if there is a fresh water spring, but a quick taste-test confirms the water is salty, and we wonder how these creatures evolved to live here.

The afternoon slips into the evening with snacks and, of course, rounds of Sleeping Queens, which has become the card game of choice for the trip.

As the sun is sets, Michael takes the boys for an evening snorkel around El Candelero, prime creature hunting time. We find green eels, many spotted box fish, and varied tropicals. The description seems varied from the morning cast of marine characters, not uncommon as the fauna cycles through the day. We surface to a burning sunset and quickly return to *Grieg* to gather Amy and Magda for the spectacle. We float together, watching the sun slowly sink in burning orange-blaze against the stunning massif of Sierra de la Giganta.

Tobias opts to sleep under the expanse of the Milky Way wrapped in the main-sail lazy-jacks, masthead light tracing a pendulum arc across constellations and galaxies. Wise decision. During the night, the small beach of the reef, enjoyed that morning, is swallowed by the tide. Amy watches the sunrise beneath Tobias' nighttime roost.

### 8.3 Scuba Diving

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*Fang Ming: Revenge of the Tortugas*

Dive the *Fang Ming*, a Chinese fishing trawler that was confiscated and subsequently sunk by the Mexican Navy for illegal fishing and human trafficking. Wreck dive, max depth of 21.3 meters, bottom temperature 26 degrees. Landed in sandy bottom at 21.3 meters, starboard side of the wreck. Always odd to see a massive ship sitting on the bottom of the sea floor. Forward to the bow, covered in sea fans. Around the bow, down the port side and up to 18 meters. Penetrated the port side, moving athwartships, exiting the starboard. Interior encrusted, many fish. Torch on, Tobias expertly navigates his first wreck penetration. Re-enter the starboard side and begin to move aft through what was likely crew living space and fish processing area, many large fish hiding in the corners, schools for Cortez Rainbow Wrasse. Tobias, again expertly navigates a confined space with limited overhead. Exit onto the stern deck, cargo holds open. Turtles lounging on the aft deck now ownig the ship that once likley illegally hunted them. From the center of the aft deck over the port rail and forward to the pilot-house, slowly peeking over the port rail we spot a massive, male, green sea-turtle. A green eel pokes its head out of a port hole. Through the port pilot house door, which is very tight, I get stuck

for a moment. We have to go single file through the small pilot house. Many small Jewelled Moray Eels throughout the wreck living in pipes and crevases. Out the starboard pilot house door and to the bow, anchor windlass still intact, more sea turtles, one lounging on the bow mast-head, which we get to briefly swim with. Amazing dive.

*Tail of the Whale: Tranquillo*

Dove the western tail of Isla Ballena, a small island just south of Ensenada Candelero. Max depth 17.2 meters, bottom temperature 25 degrees. Landed in jumbled rocks, moving west along the sand-rock interface. Large school of Cortez Sea Chubs moving to deep water. Many nudibranchs, at least 4 types. Tobias observes a nudibranch, which is wrapped around a piece of seaweed, attack its own tail, extending its mouth onto itself. Giant Hawkfish. Green Eels. First part of the dive progresses like a cool sub-tropical Pacific dive, jumbled rocks, sea stars, sea cucumbers. As we ascend from 15 meters to 10 meters we pass through a sharp thermocline, schlerring, and the entire ecosystem transitions to a tropical environment, replete with colorful schools of fish and sand flats dotted by rocky outcrops. Strong current transitions the dive into a drift dive and we float, soar, along the sand flats observing the tropical aquarium.



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Isla Espiritu Santo    Baja California Sur

## 9. Caleta Lobos: 23 June 2023

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### 9.1 Route

Location	Latitude	Longitude
Ensenada Candelero, BCS, MEX	24.505 N	110.387 W
Estero Balandra, BCS, MEX	24.326 N	110.332 W
Caleta Lobos, BCS, MEX	24.301 N	110.336 W

### 9.2 Journal

By 07:00 we've pulled the anchor and are underway, under power. The plan is a morning transit and then a long day at anchor in Estero Balandra, enjoying the beach and waters before pulling hook and relocating closer to La Paz. This will position us for a short return transit morning of 24 June 2023. If we can, however, we'll stay in Estero Balandra. We are anchored by late morning fronting a beach in 6 fathoms, sandy bottom. Some of the crew head to the beach, some remain on the boat. After the beach excursion, we take *Griegito Conchito* into the reserve to snorkel a small reef. No anchoring is permitted, so we hot-boat while most of the crew snorkels.

On our way to the reef, we spot a dark, shape-shifting mass, likely a bait ball. Tobias dons his gear and plummets into the middle of thousands for Cortez Sea Chub. I circle the reef while Amy, Zarko, Tobias, Asher, and Aleks snorkel. The large school of chubs is pressing against the reef and Asher and Aleks dive through the shifting school. It's like being on a rush hour highway of fish, very little light or space in between each individual. Moving in the current with them is a very different experience than moving in opposition. Some of the school seem to occasionally turn on their side as some sort of distraction, flickering silver. The reef is good with many tropicals and decent coverage of live coral. Amy takes a turn on the tiller while I make a quick survey of the reef, mainly swimming in the bait-ball of chubs. We take a final swing through the southwest lobe of Estero Balandra, revisiting the first snorkel spot of the trip, a jumble rock-reef habitat. It is again filled with many tropicals, Asher spots a zebra moray eel and after the intial awe, protects Mum from the specimen. Tobias and I venture through the underwater swim-through several times. Great spot. I could do this all day. Future return is a must.

We return to *Grieg*, pack our gear, confirm we cannot anchor in Estero Balandra, and pull the hook, headed for Caleta Lobos. Caleta Lobos is a small bay with two lobes to the northeast, each ending in mangroves. Amy, Michael, Asher, Tobias, Maks, Magda, and Aleks run *Griegito Conchito* to the mangrove lined beach for a final exploration. In the mangroves, we spot a jeweled moray eel and, unbelievably, watch it hunt and capture a crab. The eel slides into the mangrove roots and we continue to watch as it hunts. Asher lingers and sees it catch a small fish. Tobias finds a desicated ray on land and decides to honor it's life by setting it back in the water.

We ride out, past the tiny fish camp. This place is just everything different, quiet, simple.

We board *Grieg* and a dance party ensues to *I Ain't Worried* by One Republic, the theme of our holiday. Glorious sunset on our last night aboard.



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**Baja California Sur**

## 10. La Paz: 24 June 2023

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### 10.1 Route

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Location	Latitude	Longitude
Caleta Lobos, BCS, MEX	24.301 N	110.336 W
La Paz, BCS, MEX	24.214 N	110.299 W

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### 10.2 Journal

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Another start by 07:00, *Grieg* has to be in her slip by 10:00. We first sail toward Isla Espiritu Santo, we want to get into the channel between the island and the main-land so we can release some "messages in a bottle." The boys have each placed a message in a wine bottle, which we then re-cork and seal. We are hoping they journey on the sea before washing ashore to be found. We have included an email address in the note so whomever finds the messages in a bottle can contact us. Once we release the bottles, we head to CostaBaja Marina, replenish *Grieg*'s fuel, and return to the slip.

We pack and clean. Zarko heads off to pick-up the Urvan, which is typically delayed, giving us ample time to unload and relax in the marina. Once he returns, we, again, pile our gear and crew into the van and head to Nahuala Home. We have opted for the same accomodations on return, knowing the familairity will ease our reintigration to society. After settling gear, claiming beds, showering, and having a few beats of relaxing, Michael, Amy, Asher, Tobias, and Aleks go for a walk in La Paz. We stroll the *Malecon*, visit the scuba shop to retrieve my knife, which I left inside the pocket of the rented BCD, and enjoy a shaved ice in the sweltering heat. For a moment, a long moment, it feels like we live here, in our hearts and souls we now do. We begin to make plans to return in December.

In the evening, a quick round of souvenir shopping, a final swim at the beach, and another sumptuous meal at *La Peregrina*. The night closes early, we are all tired after this amazing adventure. We sleep well, with sadness, that tomorrow we depart, dreaming of a December return: 1,000 nautical miles from our boat's slip in Long Beach to La Paz...



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## 11. Photo Gallery

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[Sea of Cortez 2023 Photo Gallery](#)

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## 12. Articles by Tags

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### 12.1 Baja California Sur

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- [Caleta Lobos](#)
- [Caleta Partida](#)
- [Ensenada Grande](#)
- [La Paz](#)
- [La Paz](#)
- [La Paz](#)
- [San Evaristo](#)

### 12.2 Isla Espiritu Santo

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- [Caleta Lobos](#)
- [Caleta Partida](#)
- [Ensenada Candelero](#)

### 12.3 Isla Partida

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- [Caleta Partida](#)
- [Ensenada Grande](#)
- [Isla San Francisco](#)

### 12.4 Isla San Francisco

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- [Isla San Francisco](#)
- [San Evaristo](#)

### 12.5 Isla San Jose

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