

## The Chronicles of Carmen

### Santa Barbara Channel and the voyage south to Mexico

Our cruise of the Santa Barbara Channel was a wonderful experience. We went to the Channel Islands Harbor and Ventura. Both were great but Ventura with its harbor development was our favourite. Great for long walks, an easy run to shops and also to Santa Barbara by rental car. We resupplied and took in both Santa Barbara as well as a run up to Port San Louis and Pismo Beach. Well, as our time to move south was approaching, we set off to Avalon and spent another few days at this delightfully Mediterranean spot. Then into San Diego to get both our last TJ supply run and to get a water maker installed. After a week we were totally shopped out and we visited the Port Office to turn in our cruising permit. At San Diego we met some really nice folks in the marina.

So early on the morning of Oct 18<sup>th</sup> we cast off and headed south to Ensenada, an easy run. There we took on diesel, at much reduced price and went to Costco and the Super Mercado to get our Mexican supplies - meat and long life milk. Checked out the weather and made ready for our first 36 hour run. An overnigher- our first. It turned out that if we left Ensenada at 0500 then we would make Turtle Bay at around 1700 the next day. So at 0500 on Tuesday October 21st we set course for Turtle Bay. It was dark and the sea was lumpy but our adrenaline was up for the challenge. The day came quickly and then departed even faster at sundown - the sunset here is a really short affair. The night was long, Jane took to 0100 and then I took the watch till 0800. During the coming day it was apparent that the northbound flood was quite effective as we had to speed up around noon to ensure our arrival at Turtle Bay before dark. I have no desire to enter an unknown foreign port at night. At 1710 we dropped anchor in Turtle Bay and immediately renamed it Dead Fish Bay. Lots and lots of small headless fish floating in the water. Alternatively hot and humid or warm and dry depending upon whether the wind was onshore or offshore. Periods of no wind merely stank. Our recovery was under way with the two of us deciding that disturbance of our sleep patterns was no easy thing at this age.

The SSB was not performing very well, it improved somewhat when the operator learnt that there were filters installed but we have no ability to get weather faxes yet. Received a voice forecast from Pt Reyes but could not understand the sea areas referred to. More research at the Internet Café in Turtle Bay solved that issue but the coverage is in no way coastal - which is what we need. Heard the Manana Net but the Sonrisa is too noisy to make out the words and the Baja Net is just noise. Will keep trying.

The weather information at the Internet Café showed all as 'reasonable' for seven days. So after declaring the town as a definite Hugh Huckley (read pug ugly) we decided to make our second overnight run to Magdalena Bay another 250 nm southeast. The second run was lumpier, darker and as we were not as well rested it was a major pain for me. Jane was better rested and therefore not so beaten up. Anyway we made "Mag Bay" on the afternoon of day 2 and dropped our hook at Punta Belcher, a beautiful anchorage.

At Mag Bay the weather decided to be hot. A spectacular electrical storm produced an unhappy cat and about a teacup of rain. Humid! Well after an evening attempt to start acclimatizing, and just short of killing each other, we elected to start the generator and run the air conditioning. Dispositions returned towards normal and so it was that the a/c proved to be invaluable. Little did we know for how long we would need to run the a/c.

From Mag Bay it is 155 miles of inhospitable coast to Cabo San Lucas. A 24 hour run. As it stayed hot we did this with the a/c running. Unfortunately this causes the infra red heat of the generator to radiate outwards to the water tanks on each side. They got progressively warmer, almost to the point where one could not shower - the water was so hot.

We turned into Cabo at 0630 in the morning after nearly being run over by a large fleet of sport fishing vessels literally tearing out of Cabo harbor. Our choice, due to the vast cost of the local marinas, was to anchor in the bay. Some anchorage! water skiers, parasailors, jetskis, water taxis and just to top it off, two very large cruise ships just on the outer edges of the anchorage. Somewhat like pitching a tent in the middle of Victoria station, or perhaps the middle of the junction of Yonge and Dundas streets. We had heard that Cabo is a unique experience, well it is very true. Unique. A zoo, party central and yes I do believe that I noticed my age!

We launched the tender and went ashore to find the Port Captain. All cruisers have to report their arrival and departure from each port area. There was confusion when we left Ensenada and we did not get our stamped "crew list". This document lists all persons on board and it is the captain's responsibility to keep track of them. Well we had to go to the Port Captain and have our Ensenada to Cabo San Lucas list stamped and then a Cabo to La Paz list issued and Stamped. These nice folks accommodated us.

Some shopping after a ferociously expensive burger at the Hard Rock Café - well it was air conditioned!. U\$56 for two burgers with limp fries sets the tone of the place perfectly. Note that the boat a/c is still running as the day time highs are over 100 and the nights over 80. Jane and I wonder what the hell we have done. Pardon French.

The anchorage became more rolly and so on Nov 1<sup>st</sup> we moved to Cabo San Jose, some 15 miles up the coast to see if the fuel dock was open as we needed to fill up with some fine Mexican diesel. No joke - Mexican diesel is different than US diesel, it is much cleaner, burns cleaner - no smoke - and supposedly has more power. We sure like it. After arriving at Cabo San Jose on Saturday afternoon we learned that the fuel dock was closed until Monday - or maybe Tuesday. I was not happy as I had only budgeted one night for a marina. Negotiation time.

Still we did manage to get in touch with Jane's cousin Jill who has moved to Cabo San Jose so the visit had a very positive side. The road to the marina is something that defies any reasonable description and would be best tackled by a helicopter. Anyway after a great visit on Tuesday we set forth for Los Frailles an anchorage on the East Cape that is about a day's run from CSJ. The anchorage was a bit crowded and we left the next day for Los Muertos. This is a really nice anchorage at the north end of the East Cape and a day's run for Los Frailles and a day's run to La Paz.

We stayed for the night and as we felt a need to get to La Paz, left the next morning. That morning I wondered why the local fishing Pangas that had returned to Los Muertos the previous evening were not setting out. After getting clear of the headland we discovered the reason, a Norther was running. We now know what that means but back then we didn't. We should have turned back; but we carried on and the sea got progressively worse.

A Norther - and as we have since learned anything else here in the Sea of Cortez, causes a phenomenon universally known as square waves. Short sharp steep ugly things. We plugged on to the north for several hours before turning to cross into the Bay of La Paz. Then it was downhill to the port. Not a nice day but we survived it to arrive in Marina De La Paz at 1554. Time for tea.

More fun to come.