

Blue Lightning Cruise of 2009/2010 Impressions and Thoughts to Christmas 2009

This is not going to be a complete record of the trip so far. My journal is full of details on various events and places that I will eventually render into a published record. I intend only to provide impressions, highlights and thoughts of the voyage up to this time.

The delivery trip to San Diego was better and worse than expectations. I have recorded my daily notes for Seattle to San Francisco and you are welcome to review them. I don't think there is anything I would change.

You have probably heard little about the brief stay in San Francisco (Sausalito actually) and on to San Diego. We had a last moment change of crew which turned out for the best in the event. We left the Bay under sail in about 18 knots with very dense fog. The Golden Gate in all its classic glory. Shortly there after the wind quit but the fog hung on. And hung on. And hung on. We spent too much time motoring again and there were several discussions about possible fuel stops. These proved again to be unnecessary and we managed enough sailing to not have any problems but it did keep us more inshore than is my wont. The crew, none of whom I had actually met previously, turned out to be very good. Lots of experience and jolly good shipmates. On the other hand it would have been nice to see something of the land. The only clear weather was just past the Channel Islands for one afternoon and evening. We did see Catalina and San Clemente off in the mist. The run into San Diego was pea soup until we hit the outer buoys after a tense night. Finally the skies cleared to a bright blue and there we were. Land and all just as expected. All I will say about San Diego is that they do not cotton much to passing sailors. Getting permission to anchor in the bay is very difficult which I attribute to the desire to entertain only those who want to pay outrageous amounts for guest moorage.

The Ha Ha itself was interesting(?). The first day and night was (of course!) done motoring. I was so tired of motoring on this trip. Be careful what you wish for. The next two days and nights would be knock down drag outs. Almost all the fleet made an unscheduled over night stay in a bay about 150 miles south of San Diego. After setting out early the next morning away we all went into a day and night of big waves and winds with gusts to probably forty over night. Some went out, some stayed in, no one escaped. Some loved it, some endured. Roll call the next morning revealed boats scattered all over the ocean and a litany of broken gear and torn sails. There was also rumor of a boat sunk by whale attack. We actually ran on a number four jib only from late afternoon until after daylight the following morning. My biggest thrill with the boat to date occurred during my watch about 0100 when the boat came surfing off a wave and picked up a big gust at the perfect moment. The boat was actually on a full plane for about 30 seconds. That has to be some kind of record for an IOR hull which normally don't even like to surf much. This boat has always done well in those conditions and I probably don't really want to repeat the conditions but – it was fun!

The whale attacked boat for those who are wondering. It turns out the boat was the attacker and did not sink in five minutes as advertised. They came off a wave surfing at high speed and hit the whale sliding over its back and ripping off the prop shaft strut and shaft. The boat took an hour to go down so plenty of time to call for help and get off in orderly fashion. The whale was hurt as there was blood in the water but no one knows how badly or what happened to it. Every sailors worst nightmare turned out to be every whales instead.

The remainder to Cabo San Lucas would prove much tamer with yet more motoring to be done. It

was very nice to have the local knowledge represented by the fleet, many of whom had done Ha Ha several times. The problem was the schedule seemed very rushed. I think I could have spent a week at anchor in Bahia Santa Maria and there were a couple of possible places to have visited between Bahia Tortuga and Santa Maria that we missed. In the event we had one day in Santa Maria then started again just before dawn the following morning.

Bahia Santa Maria is possibly not your dream cruising destination but it is where I began to fall in love with Baha California. It is so different than anything I have ever seen but very beautiful in its own manner. More on this later.

Then we ended up in Cabo San Lucas about a day and a half later, which I would not wish on my worst enemy.

Finally escaping the clutches of Cabo and the chaos of six people on the boat one other person and I flew the Ha Ha coop to a small cove about 45 miles east. Where we ended up in an anchorage with a bunch of other Ha Ha boats. It is going to take some time for this group to disperse. We spent a couple of days there recharging and I did my first real walk on the shore amongst CACTUS! Real live ones, with long sticky spines and everything. All kinds of cactus from classic Taco Time logo to sprawling out along the ground. Barrels and leafy things. My My. They go on and on up into the fascinating mountains that will be our theme for our stay in the Sea of Cortez. I am really starting to like this impossibly arid place. Look! A little lizard scurries away under the brush. My joy in Baha increases.

Moving on north toward La Paz much refreshed we make another stop at the Cove of the Dead. Well that is what they call it. Two days later I pry TR loose from the fleshpots of Bahia de La Suenes and we attempt the run upwind in a lot of chop and current. Just under half way to La Paz there is a major break in the rig. After getting all the sails off it appears best to run back down to Ensenada de los Muertes as it will be impossible to motor upwind in this messy chop. Rig still intact we shore it up and wait two more days before trying to motor up to La Paz again.

La Paz turns out to be the good twin of Cabo. A very lovely town, very Mexican. One feature I note is that many buildings, even houses have palm leaf thatch roofs. The sidewalks are impossible which I am informed is a feature of most Mexican cities along the coast. Sometimes they end in mid block at an eight foot drop. Sometimes they just end and turn into a sandy path. Sometimes they just end. If you are lucky they do have steps at some of the elevation changes. Street signs are hit and miss, mostly miss. The tourist places have great maps but they are hard to use if you lose the count of the number of blocks from the last known intersection. I loved the public market once I found it. Then I had to refind it several times. La Paz seems in general to have a sense of humor and even the gringos are infected by it.

There is a large American ex-pat community in La Paz which is good for us in some ways as there are helpful people for advice. I am not sure it is so great for La Paz as it leads to too much American influence in the stores and encouraging CCC (actually Baha owned so far), Walmarts, Sams Club and so forth as well as a lot of developments of marginal taste and quality to serve Norte Americanos, many of whom come only for the four or five months of winter. The money is good for the local economy I am sure. I am such a curmudgeon and I hate to see my newly adopted Baha love spoiled. I run on.

Thanksgiving week arrives as does my beloved partner. We explore the back streets and other sights of La Paz for a couple of days. We then set out north to the islands for the taste of cruising strange waters I came for. We go to the first cruising choice to the north to find of course many boats. On the other hand the place is most scenic with more cactus to delight me and our first introduction to the

pelican fishing armadas. We can watch them endlessly as they dive and crash in pursuit of a meal. What seems to be hundreds congregate at certain places and four or five at a time will suddenly drop out of the sky into the same patch of water with a splash audible a mile away.

After a few days watching pelicans, exploring the beaches and attempting the Park Path (which we decided to abandon after discovering about half way that "difficult" means the rock climbs up the dry stream bed turn into twenty foot ascents requiring pitons and belaying lines we didn't bring) we move one more notch north to a place we will anchor for the time we have left.

There is a little village on one of the very very few actually protected anchorages I have found since we left Bahia Santa Maria. The Charlie's Charts anchorage is actually the least favorable in the bay but not bad either. It is on the peninsula about fifty miles by water or 75 miles by bad road from La Paz. It is populated by people who make their living fishing with pangas (twenty five foot open outboard powered utility boats), one who supplements his fishing with a cantina open from late afternoon to about one hour after dark, one who is the local tienda one day a week if they can get to La Paz to get supplies. They are open then for about two hours the next morning. Which morning is the burning question and every villager will have a different opinion as to day and time. There is also the woman, presumably a fisherman's wife, who tends the desalinization plant on request. To get water you have to walk up the hill to her house and request service. She will then open up the plant and sell you water for about one peso per litre. Did she get elected? Did she pass the federal test for desalinization technician? Did she bribe someones cousin? Questions I will never know the answers to.

There is also one amazing stone house and barn among the palm thatched shacks and mostly small not quite complete CMU buildings. It is owned by a San Diegan of course. He and his family come down for a few weeks at a time and in between it has a local fisherman living in it as caretaker. The contrast is so extreme as to be not comprehensible. I have to wonder what the locals think of it really but that will have to wait for my Spanish to improve dramatically.

In the meantime we manage to order a cerveza at the cantina and get 20 liters of water with our halting Spanish phrases. We watch the pelican show every morning and evening including the late evening group dive where thirty birds will hit the water at the same time. We snorkel along in the Avon finding new wonderful fish among the rocks along shore. Patti catches a grouper by accident while trolling off the dinghy one morning. We are not sure it is edible and no one wants to clean it so it gets sent back. We get lost in cruising time and all too soon it is time to return from this place. We pass Patti's birthday here and I don't want to go. San Evaristo. You have to stop in next time you are in the neighborhood. Tell them Blue Lightning sent you. They will stare blankly but they don't mean it. I will certainly never forget them. The tienda is in the Pink House just inshore from the desalinization plant and the cantina is under the palm thatched roof across the bay right by the Pacifico sign although they only have Modelo. The pelicans hang out at all the rocky points.

Impressions to date? I like Mexico much more than I thought I might. Most of the big cities I could maybe miss but then there is La Paz. Now I am in the tropics, actual jungle palms and banana plantations. This is so far the adventure I was hoping for and I will have to spend a little time in Puerto Vallarta to get a new perspective on the country but I expect to find new wonders here in time share condo heaven.

Aboard Blue Lightning at anchor Banderas Bay, Nayarit, Mexico SA
26 December, 2009
Michael