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OutdoorX4

EST. 2013

ISSUE 49

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Going back to our first issue, international travel has been a subject we've highlighted on multiple occasions. While travel outside the U.S. has never been our primary area of focus, I've always looked at the international stories we share as an aspirational and important component to our storytelling to engage young and old to explore the world outside your doorstep.

Throughout my lifetime, international travel has afforded me the opportunity to truly expand my world view. As a child, my family traveled regularly to Mexico City to visit friends and family. In my college years, I spent a semester studying in the Czech Republic, spending most weekends traveling with friends into the unknown. These experiences were foundational along my path and has led to where I am now: writing an editorial about exploring the world.

A few months back, I started to think about international exploration and our storyboard plans for the year. It occurred to me that in all our years, we've featured special issues including our annual Gear Issue but had never done an issue where the editorial was focused exclusively on a specific subject. That's when I thought it might be fun to do an International Issue, highlighting aspirational stories from around the globe. My only concern has been that OutdoorX4's mission has always been to deliver storytelling that anyone can relate to and enjoy, and I was worried an International Issue might suggest we're going a

direction that would make the magazine less appealing. So, to mitigate any concern, OutdoorX4 will always be focused on stories anyone can relate to with the bulk of our storytelling focused on travel stateside, particularly given most of you, our readers, are here. Sure, we'll still sprinkle a few international stories every now and then and depending on your response to this issue, we may look at producing a once annual International Issue going forward. Regardless, my hope is you'll pick-up this copy of OutdoorX4 (or read/listen to it on your mobile device or desktop) and be inspired either to visit a new place or live vicariously through the words of this issue's contributing authors. I think you'll find that if you do, the foundational experiences I've had along my path might play a role in your life's path, inspiring YOU to seek and find adventure outside your doorstep.

Frank Ledwell
EDITOR & PUBLISHER



X4

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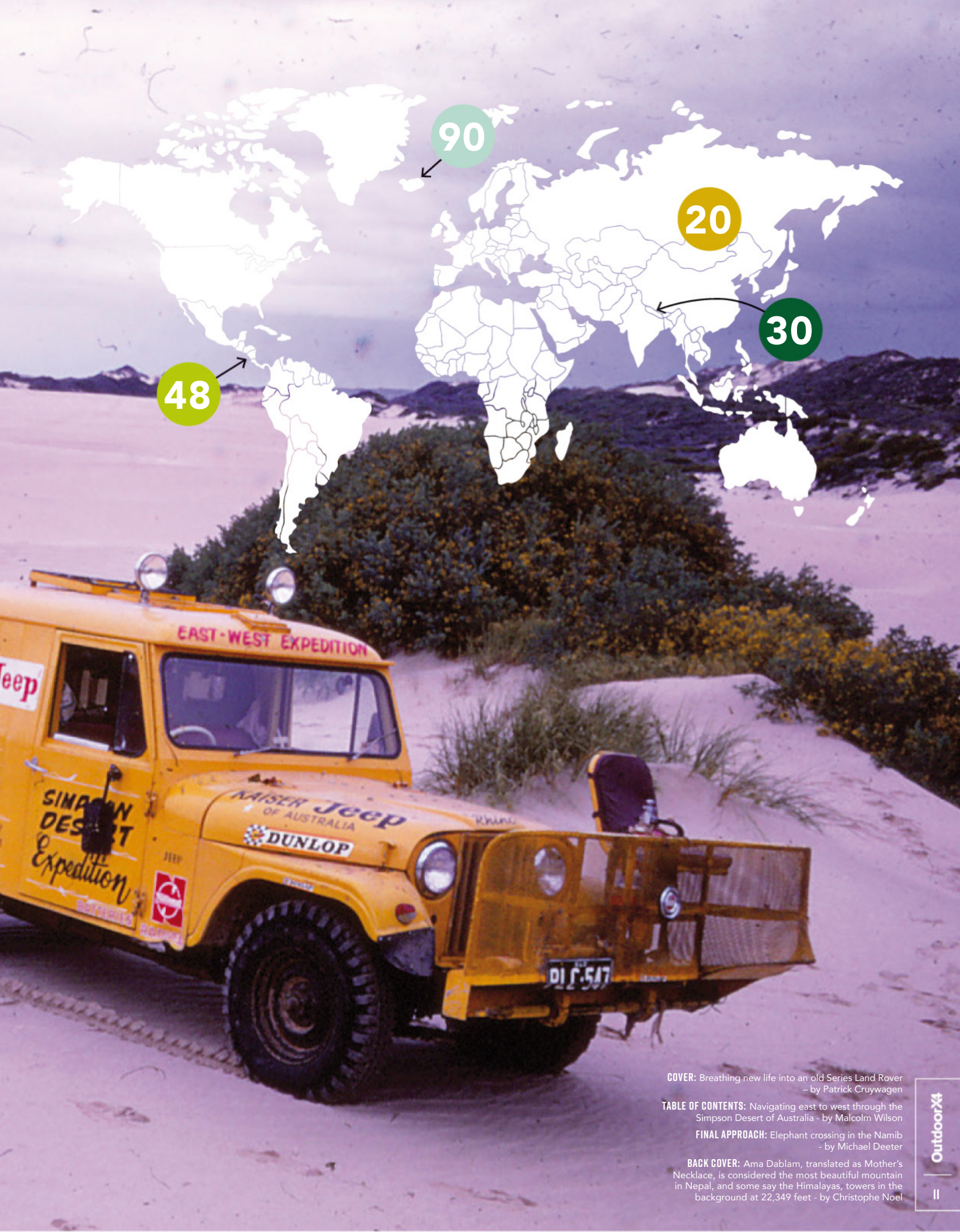
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- by Michael Deeter

BACK COVER: Ama Dablam, translated as Mother's Necklace, is considered the most beautiful mountain in Nepal, and some say the Himalayas, towers in the background at 22,349 feet - by Christophe Noel



KUAT ANNOUNCES NEW IBEX TRUCK BED RACK ECOSYSTEM



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Learn more by visiting www.kuat.com. **X4**

67 DESIGNS ANNOUNCES NEW PRO SERIES ARMS – JOINT ARM PACKS

Get ready for a game-changer! 67 Designs proudly unveils the Pro Series Arms™ - Jointed Arm Packs, expertly crafted to revolutionize the 20mm ball mount ecosystem. Made in the USA, these sleek and innovative Pro Series Arms boast a cutting-edge internal anti-rotation feature to handle additional loads and axis changes like a champ.

With a focus on meeting the demands of enterprises, fleet managers, and professional adventurers, 67 Designs has engineered the new Pro Series Arms™ to excel in any environment—in the air, on the water, or across the ground. “Years of

R&D and successful beta releases with top clients have led to this new product line,” stated Pedro of 67 Designs.

Launching as part of the Carbon Fiber Series® lineup, the Pro Series Arms™ are set to make a splash at upcoming early summer shows. Building on the success of the Pro Series Bases™ introduced earlier in 2023, get ready to elevate your mounting game with these game-changing new Pro Series Arms™ and holders.

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PETZL RELEASES AKTIK® CORE HYBRID HEADLAMP

PETZL has released a versatile headlamp dubbed the AKTIK® CORE, built for extend your dynamic outdoor activities.

Casting 600 lumens, ACTIK® CORE provides powerful and comfortable lighting to go with you when you're running, trekking, mountaineering, on your bike, or on a vehicle-based adventure. Its phosphorescent reflector makes it easy to find in the dark and red lighting keeps you from blinding those around you when you're with a group. ACTIK® CORE comes with the CORE rechargeable battery and also works with three standard batteries, thanks to its HYBRID CONCEPT design. Additional accessories allow for it to mount to a



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bike handlebar, and its compact design is perfect for attaching to your MOLLE panel or in the glovebox of your vehicle.

Learn more about PETZL and its myriad of products for outdoors adventure by visiting WWW.PETZL.COM. **X4**

SEND A RANGER: MY LIFE SERVING THE NATIONAL PARKS

Review by Frank Ledwell

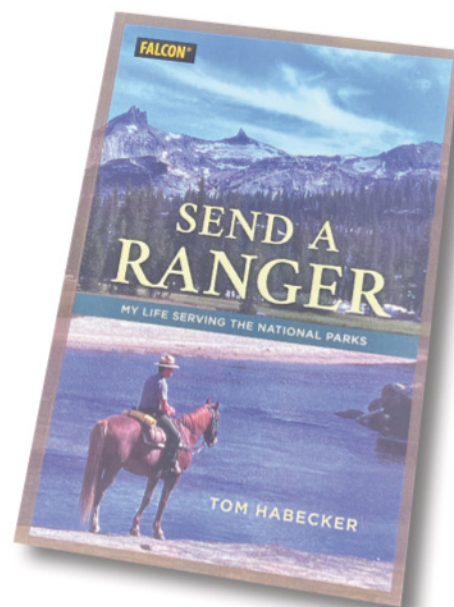
The story of Tom Habecker's life is an adventurous one. As a student intern at Gettysburg National Military Park while studying park administration at Penn State University, Tom began a 32-year career that would progress from student to journeyman and span across the U.S. at some of the most awe-inspiring parks in the National Park system.

Send a Ranger tells the story of how varied and adventurous being a park ranger can be while providing an informal and enjoyable read that captures the essence and danger park rangers endure. For Tom, his experiences included work at Yosemite, Glacier, and Denali National Parks, investigating criminal activity and grizzly bear maulings, providing advanced emergency

care for hikers and visitors in the remote backcountry, surviving the harsh winter in Alaska's wilderness, and much more. It's a chronicle and journal of one man's life while also providing an engaging context of the demands park rangers experience in an exhilarating career.

If you or someone you know is seeking guidance on a career path and looking for a job that's full of thrill, adventure, suffering, and grit, *Send a Ranger: My Life Serving the National Parks* could be the inspiration you're looking for.

Pick-up a copy anywhere books are sold or visiting Falcon Guides at WWW.FALCON.COM. **X4**



KICKIN' BACK





While there are no driving modes on the truck, the Frontier PRO-4X offers selectable low range with locking rear differential, all you'll need for moderate excursions into the unknown. The Bilstein suspension and independent front suspension with stabilizer bar provides improved ride quality on and off-pavement. Hankook's Dynapro AT2 tires provided adequate traction while traveling through the redstone, gypsum, and various rock found in Texas' Palo Duro Canyon though I'd suggest a more aggressive tire when traveling in snow and mud.

The truck also features an aluminum front skid plate that's lightweight yet durable with sidesteps that provide additional protection to the frame but also reduce ground clearance and hurt like hell when you hit them with your chin on entry/exit (which my wife and I did on a handful of

occasions). Fortunately, the steps are removable with a few bolts should you choose to remove them.

In short, Nissan's updated Frontier PRO-4X delivers a vastly improved mid-sized truck that's every bit as capable as other trucks in this segment right off the showroom floor. Depending on how you travel, minor modifications to maximize the truck's payload and tow capacity (search online for full specs of the truck) can prove beneficial if you're considering it for overland and vehicle-based adventure. And regardless of how you explore in the Frontier PRO-4X, you'll find the truck has a renewed spirit yearning to prove it's up to the task while also looking good, separating itself from its past while accelerating forward to a bright future. **X4**



NISSAN FRONTIER PRO-4X

WORDS - FRANK LEDWELL

Some things are often better late than never.

For the bulk of Nissan's twenty-five-year history of the Frontier, the truck has been a bit of a redheaded stepchild in a segment dominated by Toyota's venerable Tacoma. Sixteen years with minimal updates led to a general lack of appeal for a vehicle whose utilitarian functionality was overshadowed by a stale and dated product. Add to this the growing demand for mid-sized trucks which propelled the reemergence of Ford's Ranger, engaged the likes of American Expedition Vehicles to collaborate with GMC and Chevrolet for the Canyon/Colorado, and expanded the Jeep brand line-up with the versatile Gladiator, and it became apparent Nissan needed to up the ante or be left in the figurative dust.

Nissan's latest iteration of the PRO-4X, and really the entire line-up as a whole, is a qualitative improvement from the previous two generations. The updated 3.8L V6 is a stalwart powertrain delivering plenty of punch at 310hps along with 281 lb.-ft torque, perfectly adequate when traveling at low speed on technical terrain. The truck looks and feels great, undoubtedly designed to rival the Tacoma while maintaining its own character with a completely redesigned interior emulating other models within the Nissan line-up, all the accoutrements most consumers desire, seating that's comfortable even on 10+ hour long road trips, and increased fuel efficiency nearing 20mpg in mixed driving.

Patrick Cruywagen Digs His BBQS

I am South African and we love our red meat. Chicken is a vegetable to us. Whenever I head off in my Defender 110, I pack a BBQ grill or two. My current two favorites are the Cadac Safari Chef 30 for gas cooking and the flat-pack Front Runner BBQ/Fire Pit if using wood or charcoal.



what WE dig



Kraig Becker Never Leaves Home Without His IPAD MINI

My iPad Mini is my constant travel companion, whether I'm going solo or with someone else. It's small and lightweight yet super versatile, allowing me to watch movies, read ebooks, play games, answer emails, and take video calls while on the road. I can even take notes using the Apple Pencil and edit photos and videos too. Having so much functionality in one gadget comes in handy when traveling light.



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Michael Rudd Digs IOVERLANDER

iOverlander is an app designed by Overlanders for overland travel. It has been an invaluable resource for our adventures in Central America and immensely helpful in providing information on camping, mechanics, fuel stations, grocery stores and a variety of other categories. It's a must have for overland adventure seekers!



Gary Matos Digs RELAXATION AT CAMP

What I Dig while traveling is my respite in the early evening after a day of exploring and hiking. I find a lot of pleasure in the perfect confluence of several simple items. Give me a comfortable camp chair, a Solo Stove XL Mesa, Weller Reserve Bourbon, and a Padron 1926 Cigar, and I can devour the pages of an engaging CJ Box book.



Years—in fact decades—ago I bought one of those stick-on inclinometers for the dash of my FJ40. The device was called a Lev-O-Gage (sic); however, Roseann instantly christened it the Tilt-O-Meter, and that's the name that stuck.

I got it because I'd recently experienced a couple of side-slope situations that felt decidedly marginal, if not downright scary, and I wanted to see if my gut feelings were justified. I'd read (somewhere) that the safe operating angle for an FJ40 was 35 degrees, and I was pretty sure I'd come close to that in one spot where I got a bit off line.

Imagine my chagrin on returning to the spot and repeating the line to find that the gauge registered a "mere" 24 degrees. Nevertheless, it reset what I was comfortable with, and increased my confidence measurably in similar future situations. I left the gauge on for another year or so, but eventually took it off.

In that sense, my use of the Tilt-O-Meter made perfect sense.

However, in a larger sense, there's a real risk in assigning hard and fast numbers to a concept such as side-slope capability—and in trusting those numbers in actual real-world situations. A factory-supplied side-slope figure will necessarily have been determined in a controlled, static environment, on a stock vehicle—quite possibly without even a human inside. Install different tires, a lift, a roof rack and tent, an awning, a winch bumper, a rear rack with a jerry-can holder—name a hundred modifications and each one will have an effect on the vehicle's center of gravity. Softer suspension will allow the vehicle to lean farther than stiffer suspension. Some modifications might even *lower* the CG, but the majority will raise it, sometimes significantly. Add a human, or two, or three, and you've altered it to another indeterminate degree.

Now drive out on an actual hillside, rather than the factory's hydraulically powered tilt table with its limiting strap. So, you figure your vehicle is safe on a 35-degree slope, and head confidently sideways on an angle your iPhone inclinometer tells



you is just 33 degrees. Scary, but no problem, right? And then a downhill tire encounters a little dip, or an uphill tire bounces over a rock.

In other words, factory side-slope specifications are useful as a theoretical baseline—and for bragging rights in a pub—but your real-world application of them should be done with a hefty safety margin in mind. Practice on familiar ground until you develop an instinct for the rough incline you're experiencing, and set your own parameters for pushing the limit. If a Tilt-O-Meter—or an iPhone in a [67 Designs Mount](#)—gives you peace of mind, by all means use one.

One of the best ways I've found to reassure yourself the vehicle is secure—or, perhaps, to discover that it's far from secure—is to stop (assuming it's safe to do so), turn off the engine in gear, apply the parking brake, and get out. Go to the back or front of the vehicle and visually line up the front and rear tires on the downhill side. Now draw an imaginary line straight up from the outside of the tires. I'm willing to bet that—even if you'd been

seriously wide-eyed behind the wheel and any passengers were making high keening noises—you'll find a significant portion of the vehicle's mass on the uphill side of that line.

Incidentally, these caveats apply equally to the much-discussed question of fording capability. Who knows how each factory determines it, but it's unlikely they do so with a yardstick while crossing a river in flood stage in Brazil. While some of the same modifications that hurt side-slope capability—suspension lift, taller tires—might increase the fording depth, they might also render the vehicle more susceptible to current. A proper bow wave will increase your fording depth substantially. Angling downstream will increase your fording depth; angling upstream will decrease it. A truly waterproof, one-piece snorkel *might* increase your wading depth, but only if other vulnerable components such as the CPU are not submerged. Again, take that factory figure and use your head in applying it.

And stick with bragging from a nice, level, dry pub stool. **X4**



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Buddhists & Land Cruiser Aficionados in Siberia

WORDS – KARIN-MARIJKE VIS | PHOTOS – COEN WUBBELS

A Buddhist monastery, a meeting with a local Land Cruiser club and car troubles in eastern Russia – we were in for an interesting ride

The Siberian taiga made way for undulating grasslands with farming villages. Cows sauntered across the road and sheep grazed in the fields. Houses were constructed of logs and sported colored shutters with decorative woodwork. An occasional home had a satellite dish. As in many rural areas of the world, villages are increasingly inhabited by elderly people, while youngsters set out to establish their futures in cities. We watched a woman walk to a stream with buckets to fetch water, while a man took water containers on his cart to a pump. Who still wants to do those kinds of chores when elsewhere, water flows from the tap?





To Buddhist Russia

Russia's Autonomous Republic of Buryatia is situated south and east of Lake Baikal in eastern Siberia and borders Mongolia. Of its 900,000 inhabitants, about a quarter are Buddhist. In the 1930s, when Stalin banned anything related to religion, many temples were closed or destroyed and Buddhist monks deported. However, Buddhism went underground and was never entirely eradicated. Today, almost a century later, religion is on the rise once more. I had no clue about this part of Russia's history, was fascinated when reading about it in my guidebook, and we set out for a one-hundred-and-fifty mile detour to see a monastery.

The narrow Onon River meandered through grasslands, extending an invitation. It was such a lovely, peaceful place that we set up camp and spent a day along its shore to take a break from the long days of driving through seemingly endless Siberia. A few miles beyond the sacred river stood the brightly colored Tsugol Monastery, exuding grandness. This place had been worth the detour; it was a marvel and extraordinary to find a Buddhist monastery in a country ruled by the Russian Orthodox Church. It was open to visitors, and in our few words of Russian, we asked for permission to enter. It was inhabited by five or six monks, dressed in red robes, but for big ceremonies there could be as many as twenty, one of them told us.

A massive, gilded Buddha statue stood in a temple that had stairs to a second floor where we walked around the statue at eye-level. After visiting the temples, we were invited by a monk named Alexander to drink tea, and we followed him into a room with a long table with benches. On the table stood baskets of bread, biscuits and snacks, and jars of jams. Apparently, anybody could walk in at any time of the day to eat or drink tea. A woman in the kitchen prepared soup and pasta for those who asked for it.



"How old is the temple, two-hundred years?" I asked (I had read that somewhere).

"Yes. This temple is from 1905."

"Ah, so about one-hundred years."

"Yes. But this one was built in 1980."

We nodded as if we fully understood and enjoyed another cup of tea.

Driving north, we headed for Chita, a town on the main road to Lake Baikal. We passed a field with dozens of brightly colored, wooden beehives and stopped along the side of the road to take a photo. As we did so, the beekeeper stepped out of his cabin, spotted us, and beckoned, "Come, come!" As we approached, he pointed to a bench and insisted we sit down.

"Germany?"

"No, Netherlands."

"Oh! Amsterdam!" An excited story followed, but we didn't understand a word of it as our Russian was still way too limited.

"Wait, wait," he gestured, putting on his beekeeper veil. He walked to a hive and pulled out a frame full of honey.

"Come inside!"

Inside, we were ushered to sit down at a wooden table and in the chaos of his cabin he searched for a clean plate and forks. He served us a piece of wax with honey and gestured that we should eat. The sweet, sticky honey was delicious and we asked if we could buy a jar. He did have some jars but not for sale, at least not to us. He insisted we take two and refused to accept a penny for them. How kind was that?



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A Land Cruiser Meeting

Coen had been in touch with Andrew, a friend on Instagram, for quite some time, and he insisted we stop and visit him and his friends from the local Land Cruiser club in Chita. It so happened that on our entrance to the town we stood parked on the side of the road for a photo when a car pulled up alongside ours. A man stepped out, pointing at our Instagram account – he spoke no English – but indicated that he, in fact, was Andrew. He called his fellow Land Cruiser friends and that evening we met in a restaurant on the outskirts of the city. We were ten in total, three of whom were called Andrew. Only one spoke English, so he had a lot of translating to do. The group ordered dishes typical of Buryatia, such as sharbin or khushuur, which are different types of meat-filled pasta.

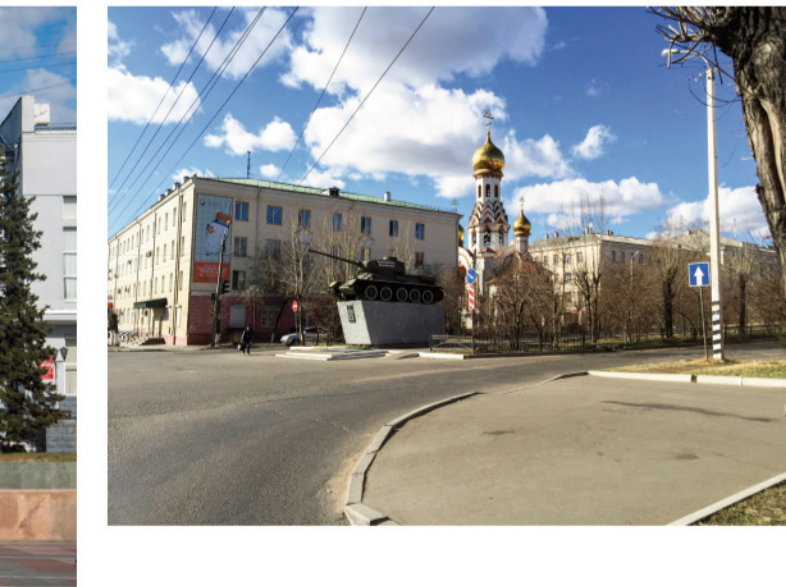
"You're not vegetarians or something, are you?" they asked, a bit late.

"Umm, yes, we are."

We ate the cucumber salad and boiled potatoes, which was fine with us. Fruit juice from dried apples and apricots was served, as was a kind of cold fruit tea. In Siberia, people drink lots of herbal tea from plants they may have harvested around the house or in the forest. One gentleman asked if we wanted a drink and we both requested beer.

"No, no, only one of you can have beer. The other has to drive," he responded, and was surprisingly insistent. It took some time to explain we had permission from the restaurant owner to spend the night in the parking lot. It was an interesting comment. We were in Russia and were not allowed to drink and drive? That certainly did not match the ideas we had of the country's driving laws. According to these men, the law in Russia on this issue was super strict. That hadn't been the case until Putin came to power and one of his earliest policies had been to make driving under the influence a punishable offense. The only two patrons who drank alcohol – they chose a home-brewed vodka – were with their wives, who drove. As is tradition, we toasted to a lot of things – to freedom, to travel, to friendship. It was a great evening in good company.



A photograph of a woman standing in shallow water next to a light blue car. A portable table is set up on the car's tire, holding a glass of wine and some food. The background is a body of water.

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A photograph of a red Toyota Land Cruiser driving through water, creating a large splash. The text "Get Out There" is written in a large, stylized font at the top.

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To Ulan Ude

When we checked the map the next morning, we realized that north of the main road, a secondary road ran from Chita to Ulan Ude. The GPS calculated both took about the same time to cover and the secondary road was twenty-five miles shorter. We took it in the hope of avoiding crowded, uninspiring cities. While this was probably not the best decision we had ever made, we will never know as we can't compare the two roads. The road's surface consisted of broken pieces of asphalt and large stretches found us bouncing on washboard. It

was energy-draining, but the countryside made up for the hardship. White stupas (pagodas) frequently dotted the grassland. Sometimes they stood amidst bushes and trees with pieces of blue cloth tied to them.

Elsewhere, the edges of the forest were cluttered with pieces of five-color cloth but without the mantras we recognized from Buddhist flags in the Himalayas. Buddhism is often intertwined with shamanism and we assumed the multi-colored cloth to be an expression of

that. Just before Ulan Ude we passed a temple and stopped to check it out. A ceremony had just ended, monks dressed in red and yellow like the Dalai Lama were packing up their things and left. A group of women stood outside, one of them offering milk to the land by turning in large circles with a carton of milk in her hand whereby the milk was gradually sprinkled into the air.

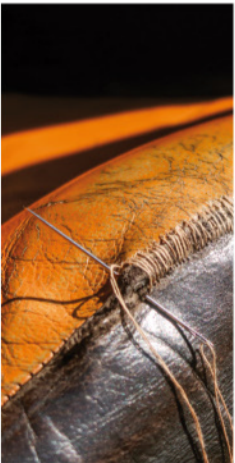
Car chores

After two long days of driving, we reached Ulan Ude, Buryatia's capital. Outside the city, a campsite was being built for overlanders. For the time being it consisted of a piece of land with a wooden fence around it and an outhouse. The location was conveniently at a cross-roads for overlanders, whether they were heading east to Vladivostok, west to Europe, or south to Mongolia. The owners - Moritz, a German motorcyclist, and Olga, who hailed from this area - welcomed us, and since we were the first visitors, it felt as if we were inaugurating the Taiga Pitch Overlanders' Campsite. We instantly clicked and spent our evenings around a campfire, drinking wine and sharing stories.

This was the perfect place to get some necessary work done on the Land Cruiser. Considering how much dust blew into our home on wheels, we figured there were new cracks in the bodywork that needed to be sealed. The spring weather was warm and offered the perfect opportunity to get the job done.

Coen bought a can of what was sold as anti-rust primer - some thick, black, sticky stuff. Moritz said we shouldn't use it. "It softens again in warm weather. Here they often smear it on benches in the parks in early spring, and anyone who regularly visits such parks in summer has stained clothing because the stuff becomes soft and sticks to your clothes," he explained.

Moritz and I drove around for an afternoon and found only a spray can with an anti-rust agent, which I sprayed on the rusted spots of the bodywork, later sealing them with Sikaflex. On another search, Coen found something else which was worth trying: Thick, sound-proofing and foldable sheets, with aluminum on one side and some kind of bitumen on the other. He took the Land Cruiser to a car wash to clean the undercarriage and we then installed the sheets wherever possible. I sealed the edges and corners with the black stuff from the can men-





tioned earlier. If that did melt in summer, it wouldn't be a problem as it was only applied below the vehicle.

For the first time in two years, I emptied the corner behind the driver's seat, where the toolbox, recovery gear, and other, rarely-used items are stored. I lifted the piece of insulation that covered the wheel arch.

"Coen, um, you'd better come and have a look," I called out hesitantly.

I was staring at the grass through a large hole in the wheel arch. Two household

batteries hung below it, or rather, should have been hanging below a container. Only one bolt remained. How much longer would that have held out before the whole thing dropped from the Land Cruiser on some potholed or washboard road? While in shock at what we saw, at least we were spared that disaster.

Maybe this explained our recurring electrical problems. Appliances sometimes worked and sometimes didn't, and we hadn't been able to find the cause. It might have been a grounding issue. The big question was: How would we fix

it? Coen contacted the international and Russian overland community via Facebook and Instagram, including a 4x4 club in Ulan Ude. A few days later, he drove into the city, met the local clan in their shed and they fixed the hole in the wheel arch by welding a piece of metal across it, sealing it with Sikaflex. The battery housing was reinstalled. It didn't look pretty, but it was sturdy and that was all we asked. It was time to hit the road again, on to our next adventure. **X4**



KARIN-MARIJKE VIS AND COEN WUBBELS — AUTHOR BIO

In 2003, Karin-Marijke Vis and Coen Wubbels swapped the rat race in the Netherlands for a life on the road. They bought a beat-up, 1984 Toyota Land Cruiser and set out for a journey to Southeast Asia. They then shipped the car to Argentina and explored South America for nine years, after which they returned to Asia. They are currently in Central Asia. While Coen likes to joke that they rob banks when asked how they earn money for their life on the road, in reality Karin-Marijke and Coen work as a writer-photographer team. Their work has been published in numerous monthlies and travel magazines.

You can follow them at LANDCRUISINGADVENTURE.COM

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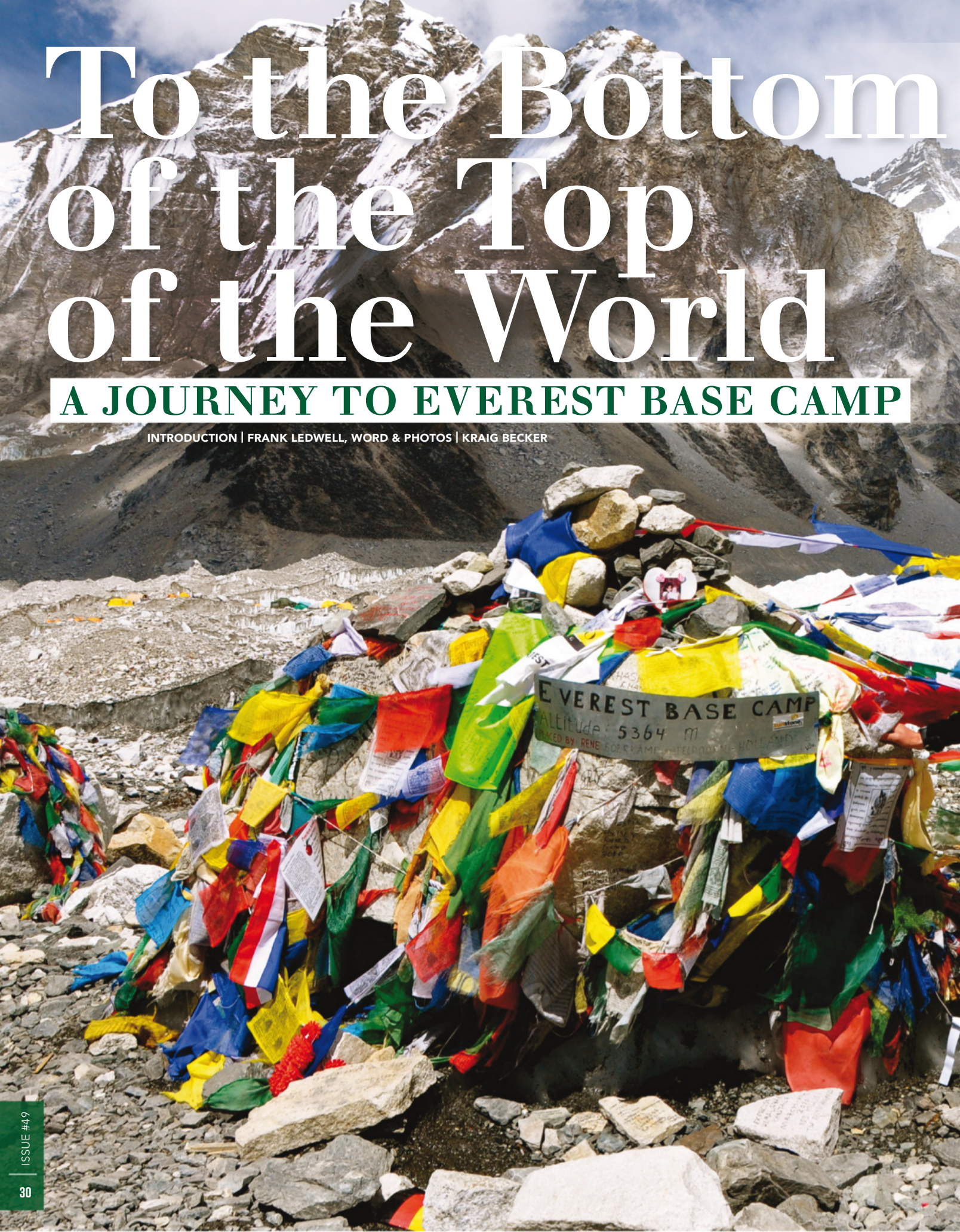


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A JOURNEY TO EVEREST BASE CAMP

INTRODUCTION | FRANK LEDWELL, WORD & PHOTOS | KRAIG BECKER

While climbing the last few steps into Everest Base Camp, it can be difficult to catch your breath, and not just because you are approaching 17,600 feet in altitude. Towering high overhead are some of the most iconic peaks on the planet, and the sense of scale is both awe inspiring and humbling at the same time.

Seventy years ago, the famed British exploration team led by Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay Sherpa made history when they successfully summited the top of the world. Their feat brought about instant fame and became legend within the mountaineering community, and would lead to opening up the Everest region for expanded exploration

and eventual commercialization of the world's highest peak.

Making the trek to Base Camp on Nepal's south side of the mountain (there are two base camps: one in Nepal and one on the north side of Everest in China) has been a staple on the wish lists of adventure travelers, backpackers, and Everest junkies for years. For most, it is as close as they'll ever come to standing on the summit, and yet they feel compelled to go there and gaze upon the mountain – a sight that certainly does not disappoint.

Nothing about the Base Camp Trek is easy, including just getting to Nepal. My journey required more than 30 hours of travel just to

reach Kathmandu, the capital of the country and gateway to the Himalaya. When you do arrive, you're greeted with a hot, dusty, chaotic, and noisy city that will have you bordering on the edge of sensory overload.

Fortunately, my stay in Kathmandu was brief as the next morning I was on a flight to Lukla, the starting point for all treks in the Khumbu Valley. Access to Lukla is gained via the Tenzing-Hillary airport, named after the first two men to summit Everest. The airport is infamous as its only runway actually runs up the side of a mountain. This helps incoming planes to stop in a much shorter distance though the approach can be a bit unnerving to watch, especially if you happen to be on one of those incoming planes.



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OutdoorX4



Once you're on the ground in Lukla, the journey to Everest Base Camp officially begins. Your first day on the trail is a rather short one and gives little indication of the challenges that await you down the road. However, the second day delivers a healthy dose of reality as it is one of the longest and most physically challenging days of the entire trek. You'll gain nearly half a mile in vertical elevation which culminates with your arrival in Namche Bazaar, the main trading center in the Khumbu.

Built onto the side of a mountain, Namche Bazaar is one of the more popular and well-known stops along the trek. The narrow cobblestone streets are lined with teahouses and gear shops that sell all manner of equipment. If you've forgotten something important for your journey, Namche is likely to be your last chance to add it to your pack. Once you're finished shopping, you'll find a number of bakeries, internet cafes, and pubs to help you relax and pass the time. The village is generally used as an acclimatization point

as well, with most groups taking a rest day to get used to the altitude.

After departing Namche, you'll get your first real glimpse of Everest and her sister Lhotse, peeking out from behind distant clouds. The sight of both mountains is awe-inspiring, even from a distance, and the view serves as a great reminder of why you have come to Nepal. But it is the 22,349 foot Ama Dablam that commands center stage for much of the trek and with its unique, highly distinctive, profile, it is easy to see why it is considered one of the most beautiful mountains in the world.

Over the course of the next few days the trail winds its way through a number of villages, which continue to diminish in size as the trek goes higher. These villages have names like Tengboche, Dingboche, and Lobuche, and they are home to the friendly and hardy mountain people of Nepal. You'll pass by Buddhist temples, through rhododendron forests, and around monuments to fallen climbers while those omnipresent snow-capped

peaks continually provide the most stunning views found anywhere on the planet.

The path gets increasingly dustier as you move to higher altitudes and when combined with the dry, thin air, the dust tends to bring on a nasty ailment that is commonly known as the Khumbu Cough. Few who visit the region seem to be able to escape this hacking cough which manifests itself deep in your chest and seems to come on at the worst times. For many travelers, it is the longest lasting souvenir from Nepal, staying with them long after they have returned home.

The last stop before Base Camp is a ramshackle collection of buildings known as Gorak Shep. From here you would think it would be an easy stroll up to BC; however, it is still a few hours and 600 vertical feet further up the valley. Adding to the challenge is the trail itself which becomes quite rocky, making the final push to your final destination a gut-wrenching and exhausting one. Once the end of the trek is in sight and you can see the tent city that





is Base Camp from a long way down the trail, you'll be pushed by a renewed inspiration to finish the trek and reach the foot of the mountain you came so far to see.

The official altitude of Everest Base Camp is 17,590 feet. It's marked by a large sign, fastened to a boulder and surrounded by multi-colored prayer flags which flap wildly in the wind. I arrived with both a sense of exhilaration and relief as the trek had been a challenging one though the rewards more than made up for it. Once I arrived, I sat on a large boulder, sipping from my water bottle while eating an energy bar, and I couldn't help but feel a wave of satisfaction. The scenery was spectacular and I had made it to one of the true classic adventure destinations. A smile spread across my face thinking of the wonder of it all.

And that's when it hits you. The scale of the place is simply enormous. You're at 17,000 feet, well above any point in the continental United States, and yet the surrounding peaks still loom another

10,000+ feet over head. It has a way of making you feel very, very small.

Shortly after that realization, another one sets in. For the trekkers, Base Camp is our destination. From there we'll go back down to thicker air, comfortable beds, and good meals. But for the climbers, who have come to Everest to stand on the top of the world, this is just the beginning. They'll spend weeks acclimatizing and preparing to go up the mountain. It is a subtle reminder of just what it takes to scale the tallest mountain on the planet. That realization makes you respect the climbers and the accomplishments of their predecessors, most notably Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay Sherpa, whose will to succeed at the impossible has driven the hopes and dreams for all.

And with that, I turned back down the Khumbu, humbled yet happy that I had come to that place which rests at the bottom of the top of the world. ❧



Gearing up for Everest Base Camp



The gear you take with you on a trek to Everest Base Camp can play a vital role in how much you enjoy the hike. High quality gear can make the hike an enjoyable experience, while sub-par equipment can turn an enjoyable walk in the mountains into a grueling death march. Here are some gear tips to consider when packing for the Himalaya:

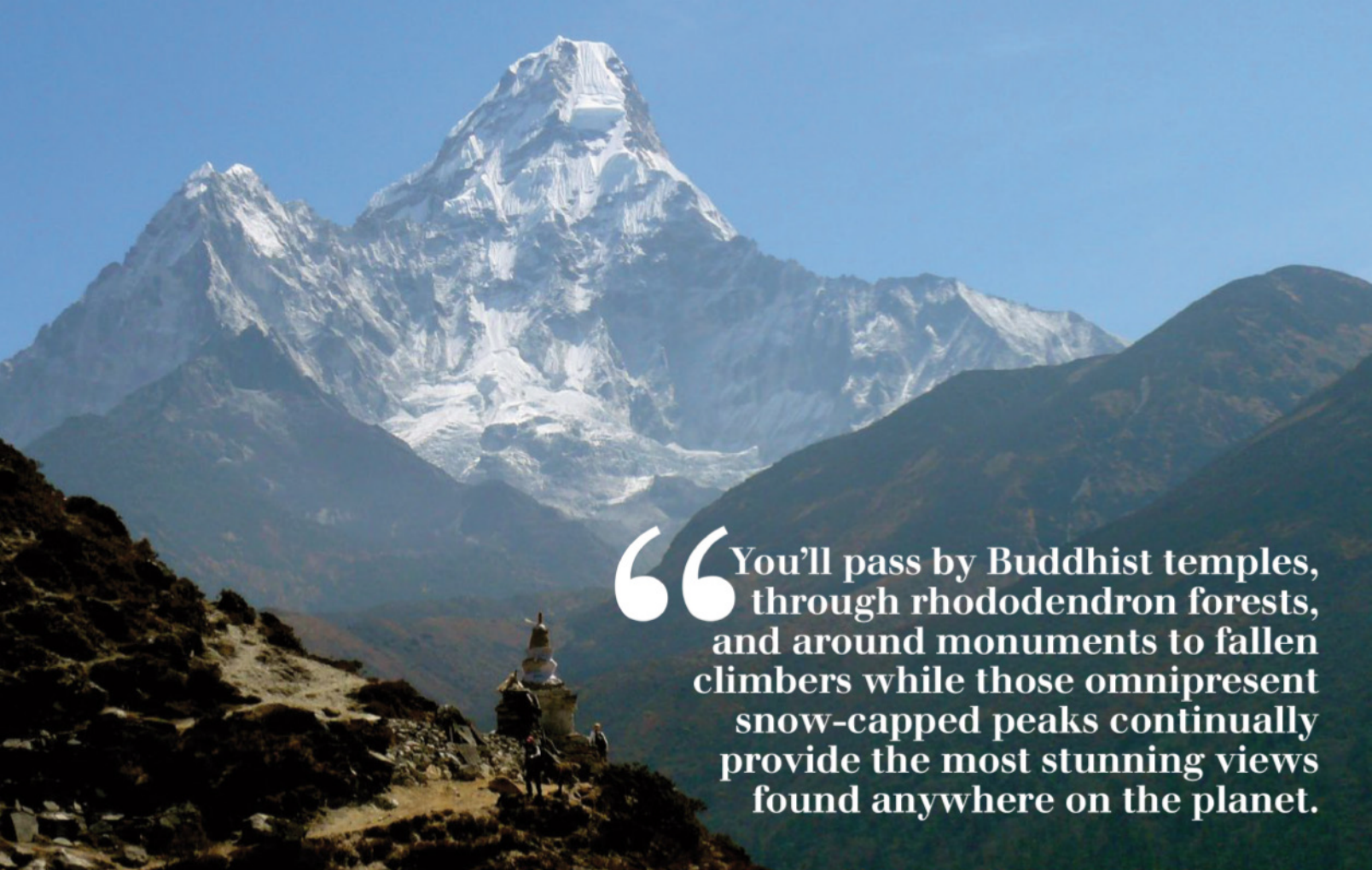
Boots: The most important piece of gear you'll take with you are your boots. Keeping your feet happy is of the utmost importance. Bring a comfortable pair designed for mountain trekking and make sure they are well broken in ahead of time.

Hat: The sun can be brutal at altitude, relentlessly beating down on trekkers who don't even recognize its power. A wide-brimmed hat can help protect you from the sun and keep you comfortable on the trail.

Trekking Poles: A good set of trekking poles can save a lot of wear and tear on your legs both when you're going up and coming down. Bring a pair with built in shock absorption as it will come in handy on the uneven, rocky trails in the Khumbu Valley.

Down Jacket: In the early stages of the trek you'll be plenty warm in lightweight clothing; however, as you gain altitude the temperatures will begin to plunge. A down jacket can keep you hiking comfortably even when the mercury falls.

Sleeping Bag: You'll spend your nights in traditional Nepali teahouses but they aren't particularly warm. Bring a good sleeping bag rated for 0°F and you'll sleep comfortably all the way to Base Camp.



“You’ll pass by Buddhist temples, through rhododendron forests, and around monuments to fallen climbers while those omnipresent snow-capped peaks continually provide the most stunning views found anywhere on the planet.





Travel Tips For Nepal



Chaotic Kathmandu: Kathmandu is one of the most colorful and wild cities you can imagine, but it can also be overwhelming. It is noisy, dusty and crowded. On top of that, rolling blackouts can hit at any time, throwing entire neighborhoods into darkness. Be prepared to deal with “Bandhs” or general strikes, which can bring the entire city to a standstill.

Last Minute Shopping: Forgot a piece of gear at home? Need to add something to your pack before you leave for the mountains? Then be sure to visit the Thamel District in Kathmandu to discover gear nirvana. Shops and restaurants line the crowded streets of this popular part of town, where you can buy just about any piece of outdoor equipment you can imagine. Prices are generally competitive, but counterfeit

gear is not uncommon. In short, if a deal seems too good to be true, it probably is.

Eat Like A Sherpa: While on the trail you’ll be eating in teahouses on a nightly basis and while the food is good, there isn’t always a wide variety. If you want to dine like the locals, order a plate of Daal Bhat which is a mix of vegetables, lentil soup and lamb or yak meat. It is tasty and provides plenty of energy for the trail. How else do you think the Sherpas are capable of carrying such large loads?

Visit The Rum Doodle: When the trek is done and you’re back in Kathmandu, drop by the Rum Doodle restaurant for the best steak in town. You’re likely to spot an Everest climber or two, as those who reach the summit eat at the Rum Doodle for free.

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Behind the Wheel

The World's Top Overland Routes



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WORDS & PHOTOS – PATRICK CRUYWAGEN

You know the feeling – you’ve spent a few days away exploring the wilderness and now wanderlust has set in. Perhaps it’s time for a sabbatical or long leave? Or, if you are feeling really brave, then why not pack in the job, sell the house, take the kids out of school, and hit the world’s overland trails for several months or even years. But where to go?

When you speak to people who overland for a living – people such as Kingsley Holgate, Ron Moon, Graeme Bell or Andrew St. Pierre White – their faces light up when their talk turns to their personal bucket list of overland trails or routes.

We’re not sure what those guys would suggest, but here’s our list of epic overland trails:





Cape Town to Cairo

No other continent possesses the allure of Africa. The people, wildlife, suspension-challenging tracks and wide-open spaces make it an overlander's paradise. And African adventures don't come bigger than the drive from Cape Town in the south to Cairo, Egypt, at the top of the continent.

The easiest route takes you through Tanzania, Kenya, Ethiopia and Sudan, while more adventurous souls prefer the route along the west coast of Africa. Before undertaking an epic journey like this, here are a few important things to consider: [<link to article published on 23 March Choosing the right camping and overlanding vehicle>](#)



Simpson Desert, Australia

The Simpson Desert is big: 55,000 square miles big. It's also the largest parallel dune desert in the world. To cross its 1,136 dunes takes a minimum of four days, so a well-prepared 4x4 is essential – and take ample water supplies, because help can take days to reach you, should you have a problem. Spend a night or two at the Dalhousie Hot Springs before starting the crossing and try the tasty camel pies at the Birdsville Bakery. A highlight of your Simpson journey is reaching the summit of the Big Red dune, at the end of the trail. Don't get caught without water in the desert. Front Runner's twenty or forty-two-litre Pro Water Tank will help you do just that.



Pan-American Highway

The Pan-American Highway is considered by many to be the ultimate road trip. Stretching 17,000 miles, this makes it the world's 'longest motorable road' according to the Guinness Book of World Records. If you drive 350 miles a day, it will take you fifty days to complete. We recommend taking a minimum of six months to do it.

The official route includes Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Chile. Lots of folk start their trips in Alaska, thereby adding the United States and Canada to that official list. Some people also like to include Argentina at the end. There is a short, infamous section between Colombia and Panama known as the Darién Gap – you'll need to ship your vehicle across unless you have a large, highly-skilled support team, and heaps of spare parts.





London to Singapore

In 1955, several Oxford and Cambridge University students set off from London in two Land Rovers. Seven months, twelve-thousand miles, and many adventures later, they arrived in Singapore. Expedition member Tim Slessor wrote a book about it, called *The First Overland*, which

has since become the inspiration for many an overlanding adventure. In 2019, one of the original Land Rovers from that trek left Singapore to drive back to London. Fittingly, this expedition was called *The Last Overland* and Alex Bescoby's book of the same name is worth a read. As you can imagine, the expeditions used different routes due to the ever-changing

political landscapes. Both were able to visit Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, and Myanmar but the rest took different routes. *The First Overland* used a more southern route taking in places like India, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq and Syria – while *The Last Overland* used a more northerly route and instead went through Nepal, China and some of the Stans.

Nordkapp

People love using geographical points as an excuse for an overland adventure and Nordkapp – the most northern point in mainland Europe – is one such place. It lies at the northernmost tip of mainland Norway and to reach it you will enter the Arctic Circle, another geographical notch on your travel post. How do you get there? Simple: Head for Norway and then for the most northern point on a map. Brace yourself for spectacular scenery before the finish at the Nordkapp's iconic steel globe sculpture, which overlooks the Barents Sea. Depending on the time of year you're there, you may even be dazzled by the Northern Lights.



Wildebeest migration in Kenya or Tanzania

If you're looking for one reason to do an overland trip in Africa, then this should be it: Imagine witnessing 1,500,000 1.5 million wildebeest migrating over the east African savannah. The best thing about this is that they don't travel alone – they bring lions, cheetahs and hyenas along with them. Make sure you go to the right place at the right time, as these animals move between the Serengeti in Tanzania and the Masai Mara in Kenya.



Help Protect the Adventure!

By practicing the Tread Lightly! principles, you not only protect the outdoors, but you protect access to recreation opportunities for years to come. Check out this issue's T.R.E.A.D quick tips on how to travel responsibly on your international adventure:

Travel Responsibly

Always practice minimum impact travel and recreation techniques when getting outside, and be aware of local laws and regulations.

Respect The Rights of Others

Be considerate and learn the basics of trail etiquette in the area you're visiting.

Educate Yourself

Prior to your trip, obtain travel maps and regulations from local agencies. Plan for your trip, take recreation skills classes, and know how to operate your equipment safely.

Avoid Sensitive Areas

Stay on designated routes to avoid sensitive areas such as meadows, lake shores, wetlands, and streams.

Do Your Part

Leave it better than you found it. Pack out what you pack in and practice minimum impact recreation.

Do your part to respect local customs and set an example as a steward. Remember, you're not only visiting new places but also an ambassador to the areas you're visiting.

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North Coast 500, Scotland

Is this the most beautiful five-hundred-mile stretch of road in the world? We certainly think so. Kick off the route in Inverness and head west to the coast. But first, you'll have to make your way up the steep and winding singletrack Pass of the Cattle, the steepest in all of Scotland. Stop at the Applecross Inn for some fresh seafood before taking in the west coast where you'll discover a postcard-worthy view around every corner. White beaches, salmon smokehouses, single malt distilleries and rugged mountains – this route has it all.



Iceland and the Northern Lights

Every year the number of tourists who visit this incredible country increases dramatically. Most of them do the 130-mile Golden Circle, taking in incredible attractions such as the Great Geysir and the Gullfoss Waterfall. Research how best to kit out your 4x4 for Iceland's unique environment and go where mainstream tourists can't; the uninhabited Icelandic Highlands are a good starting point. The volcanic deserts you'll find are a great place from which to enjoy the Northern Lights in relative peace. Nothing beats lying awake in your Front Runner Roof Tent while watching the Northern Lights dance away in the night sky.



The Canning Stock Route, Australia

They call this the toughest four-wheel drive track in the world, and rightfully so; everything seems bigger and more dangerous down under. This route runs from Halls Creek in the Kimberley Region of Western Australia – to Wiluna in the

midwest region. Stretching 1,150 miles, it's the longest, historical stock route in the world. It was created in 1910 to connect a series of wells that stockmen used to get their cattle south to the market. The remote nature of the trail and the fact you must cross dunes means it's not for the faint-hearted or inexperienced. **X4**



PATRICK CRUYWAGEN — AUTHOR BIO

Patrick has spent the last 20 years driving some of the finest 4x4 tracks in the world. He used to be the editor of Land Rover Monthly Magazine but recently joined Front Runner's global marketing team. He is at his happiest when cruising around Africa in a Land Rover, of course.

Editor Note: Choosing the best overland routes in the world is a subjective topic and we recognize there are a number of additional routes that could be added to this list, including in North America. Email us at editor@outdoorx4.com and let us know which routes you think should be included in this list.

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Osa Wild

A JOURNEY INTO THE HEART OF COSTA RICA

WORDS & PHOTOS – MICHAEL RUDD

BLUE-CROWNED MOTMOT



HARPY EAGLE



MORPHO BUTTERFLY



Indiana Jones: There's a big snake in the plane, Jock!

Jock: Oh, That's just my pet snake, Reggie.

Indiana Jones: I hate snakes, Jock! I hate 'em!

Jock: Come on! Show a little backbone, will ya?

- Raiders of the Lost Ark

Peninsula de Osa is in a remote and lush corner of southern Costa Rica and has over forty unique species of snakes, 140 species of mammals, 370 bird species and more than 10,000 insect species, making it one of the most biodiverse places on earth. For years, I've been intrigued by the idea of planning an overland adventure to document some of the Osa's flora and fauna. Recently, my wife Breck and I outfitted our 2005 Toyota 4Runner at our winter home in Playas del Coco and headed south on the Pan-American Highway.

We climbed down from our rooftop tent and set foot on a secluded beach a few miles west of Puerto Jimenez. After brewing a couple of cups of joe in a traditional Costa Rican coffee press, we set off for our morning stroll along a magnificent stretch of golden sand. To our delight, there was not another soul in sight. Suddenly, my wife shrieked in terror as she nearly stepped on a yellow-bellied sea snake, a highly venomous serpent that had washed up on the beach. After explaining that they seldom bite humans, she reminded me that she still hated snakes.



PLAYA CARATE



PLAYA PRECIOSA- PUERTO JIMENEZ





GRASS ROAD BEACH CAMP

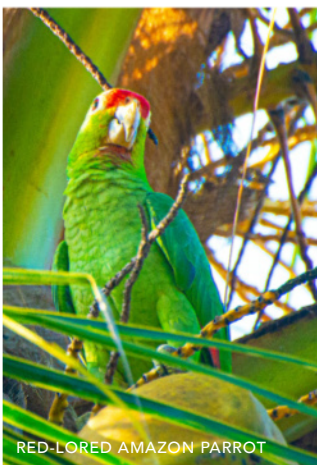
Back at camp, I was snapping a few pictures of a rare harpy eagle, one of the most powerful raptors in the world. It was perched high in a tree above our rig and was eating a freshly caught fish. While the harpy was devouring its head, noticeable pieces of fish guts fell onto the windscreen of our truck below. As I grimaced, and reluctantly began to clean the window, I turned to Breck and jested, “So, honey, how are you liking our first morning in the Osa?” She smiled.

We studied the map and planned our route to the eastern entrance to Parque de Corcovado as we enjoyed fresh mahi tacos – the fish were caught in Coco a couple of days earlier. Afterwards, we broke camp and traveled a route known by the locals as Grass Road Beach (GPS 8.48341, 83.28411), and headed south on Road 245 towards Cabo Matapalo. Matapalo, at the tip of the peninsula, is popular among experienced surfers and features a rugged coastline flanked by a towering rainforest teaming with wildlife. Brightly colored pairs of scarlet macaws screeched overhead as howler monkeys loudly defined their territory while we traversed the rough and rutted track to the beach in our 4Runner. When we reached the end, we were rewarded with one of the most spectacular seascapes we’d ever seen. We embraced the peaceful remoteness of the cape and broke the heat with an ice-cold Imperial cerveza.

SPOTTED EAGLE RAY



RED-LORED AMAZON PARROT



CAPUCHIN MONKEYS



Moving on, we backtracked to Road 245 and turned left towards Carate, a tiny village at the end of the road and a popular homebase for treks in Corcovado via the La Leona Ranger Station. There isn’t much development here except for a few remote ecolodges, a closed pulperia and a small airstrip next to the beach. We were careful to top off our fuel and stock our supplies in Jimenez, as there are no services along the forty-kilometer route.

Upon arriving at Carate, we carefully drove our rig onto the sand and parked next to a picnic table under an incredible stand of coconut palms. This beach



is an important nesting ground for olive ridley, leatherback, green, and hawksbill sea turtles, which come ashore at night to lay their eggs. We stood in awe of the beach's isolation, while dozens of colorful scarlet macaws and capuchin monkeys in the surrounding almond trees curiously watched our every move. The area is protected and studied by the Sea Turtle Conservation Program (www.osaconservation.org) which also offers a sea turtle volunteer program. After lunch, we strolled down the long and secluded beach and saw evidence of some of the estimated three-thousand yearly nests. We were careful not to disturb them as we made our way to the sea to cool off from the heat and humidity.

While exploring Costa Rica for nearly two decades, I've had endless opportunities to camp on amazing beaches, in lush rainforests and near active volcanoes. Now, for the first time, we arrived at the Osa, a place that National Geographic Magazine dubbed "the most biologically intense place on earth." We yearned to get as deep into the rainforest as we could possibly and set up camp. As it turned out, we found a 4x4 trail that continued past Carate to a very remote eco-resort, Luna Lodge, on the edge of Corcovado. The three-mile crawl followed the Carate River for most of the way and then wound up a steep incline, requiring 4-low for the last stretch. The lodge was hand built by Lana Wedmore of Colorado, her Tico boyfriend along with local labor and was opened in the year 2000. Sourcing and delivering the materials for the project was an exhausting challenge. Back then, there was virtually no road, phone or internet, only the wild remoteness of the virgin rainforest. After meeting Lana, she explained that she has owned and operated the lodge for the last twenty-three years and that she was passionate about the conservation of the Osa. She invited us to dinner and kindly offered to let us camp on her property, and we obliged. We enjoyed a delicious meal prepared with produce from her organic gardens and locally caught fish.

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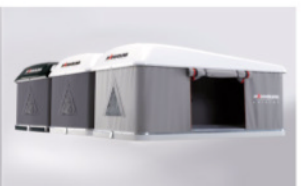
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After dinner, Lana welcomed us to our campsite, one of three that she has set aside for overlanders. Once our camp was set, we canvassed our plans for exploring Corcovado while relaxing under the massive rainforest canopy. We fell asleep to the exotic and eerie sounds of jungle insects, frogs and other unfamiliar critters. At one point during the night, we were awakened by a downpour so intense we wondered if our tent would collapse.

The next morning, we carefully climbed down from our tent only to notice a red dye all over our truck. It had rained so hard overnight that the color from the tent canvas was now all over our shiny silver paint job. As Breck prepared our morning meal, I wiped down the truck while being attacked by mosquitos. Already, the humidity was so overwhelming that even the simplest of tasks caused sweat to pour from my body. After breakfast, we hiked deep into Lana's sixty-acre property to a series of waterfalls on the Carate River. Along the steep and treacherous trail to the falls, we noticed several species of flora and fauna that we hadn't seen before. A blue-tailed skink caught my attention and I managed to capture an image of the lizard scurrying through the rainforest. At the river, we were surprised to see freshwater prawns moving about the shallows looking for food. I managed to convince Breck, who was reluctant to take a dip in the aquamarine pool, that the crustaceans were harmless and tasted a lot better than they looked. After several unsuccessful attempts to catch a few, we decided to cool off under a stunning waterfall. While being massaged by the falls, we observed morpho butterflies glide past us and a family of howler monkeys lounging in the humid canopy above.

The following morning, we chose a day trip into the park that we easily arranged at the lodge. Visitors to Corcovado must be accompanied by a certified guide from the Instituto Costarricense de Turismo (I.C.T.) and purchase a permit to enter. Besides being extremely knowledgeable about the trail system, local guides



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SCHOOL OF SERGEANT MAJOR



are experts in identifying the flora and fauna and locating many species. We met our guide at Playa Carate and hiked the beach for about an hour to reach the La Leona Ranger Station. Along the way, we spotted capuchin monkeys, collared peccaries, red-lored Amazon parrots and macaws. Our guide explained that the park encompasses the only remaining old growth wet forests on the Pacific Coast of Central America and has thirteen major ecosystems – including lowland rainforest, jolillo palm forest, highland cloud forest and mangrove swamps, as well as marine and beach habitats.

We entered and hiked among some of Corcovado's seven-hundred species of trees, which includes a massive ceiba measuring 252'. In this forest lives the largest populations of jaguars, scarlet macaws, and tapirs in Costa Rica. The park is also home to pumas, ocelots, giant anteaters and harpy eagles. Other species include spiders, capuchin, howler and white-faced monkeys, silky anteaters, poison dart frogs, and crocodiles, as well as the bushmaster and fer-de-lance pit vipers. The last two we hoped never to encounter, as they are among the deadliest snakes on the planet.



NOEL'S CARVINGS

Boruca

BEHIND THE MASK

Not far off the Pan-American Highway, near the town of Palmer Norte, lies Reserva Indigena Boruca. Our GPS guided us to Boruca, an indigenous village located high up in the mountains above the Rio Grande de Terraba. While walking around the village, we were warmly greeted by an enthusiastic artisan, Noel Lazaro Morales, who shared his art, culture, and home with us. As a proud descendent of the Boruca, he explained that he was born in the village and learned the craft

of mask-making from his elders. The story about how the Boruca survived annihilation by the Spanish conquistadors has been passed down through the generations and has influenced their art of the mask. An annual festival, Baile de las Diablos, celebrates the resistance of the Spanish, enabling their culture to thrive well into the twenty-first century.

For more information on the Boruca-
WWW.BORUCA.ORG

NOEL LAZARO MORALES: BORUCA CRAFTSMAN





SCARLET MACAWS

While exploring the dense rainforest, we saw a blue-crowned motmot, black-mandibled toucan, a sloth, and a pair of Pacific screech owls. We admitted that we needed much more time here, as the wild-life is not as easy to spot in the dense forest as it is on the coast. Nevertheless, our short time in Corcovado was a rewarding experience during which we discovered its immense beauty and biodiversity. As we hiked the long and desolate stretch of beach back to the truck, we were already discussing our plans to return.

After nearly a week of exploring the Osa's southern realm, we packed up our rig and set out for Drake Bay. The turnoff lies thirty-five kilometers north of Puerto Jimenez at the small village of Rincon near the shores of the Golfo Dulce. Drake – one of Costa Rica's most isolated destinations – is like a lost world lying between Corcovado and Humedal Nacional Terraba-Sierpe, the country's largest mangrove swamp. We couldn't wait to get there to check it out!

Our 4Runner handled the rough road towards Bahia Drake with ease as we navigated steep switchbacks over the mountainous terrain. Along the twenty-seven-kilometer route towards the coast, we crossed a couple of rivers and passed through Rancho Quemado, a quaint hamlet founded by gold miners in the 1940s. Nowadays, locals regularly welcome travelers who come here to learn about gold-panning and sustainable farming, or to enjoy rural, Tico hospitality enroute to or from the bay.

We arrived in Agujitas, a small village that serves as the area's commercial center. From here, one can hire a boat to enter Corcovado at the San Pedrillo Ranger Station or hike the seventeen-kilometer coastal trail. Dive charters are popular and can take you to Reserva Biologica Isla Del Cano. It lies twenty kilometers offshore and is one of the best diving locations in Costa Rica. The waters around the island offer excellent visibility and feature intricate rock formations, along with fifteen different species of coral. Experienced scuba divers will have the opportunity to see an amazing array of fish as well as hammerhead sharks, manta rays, dolphins, sea turtles and humpback whales. With a limited amount of time, we only snorkeled in the bay. We parked on the beach near Punta Agujitas, grabbed our gear and entered the turquoise sea. The bay was teeming with marine life. Not far offshore, we swam with huge schools of vibrant fish and saw a spotted eagle ray. After a very rewarding snorkeling experience, we set up a beach camp and prepared some lobster that I had speared for our lunch. It was the perfect way to spend our time in Bahia Drake.

Our journey to the Osa was a bucket-list experience that quenched our thirst for adventure. With its vast tracts of untouched wilderness, indigenous peoples, and unparalleled biodiversity, the Peninsula de Osa is most certainly the jewel of Costa Rica. **X4**

RESOURCES:

iOverlander - App

Luna Lodge - www.lunalodge.com

Peninsula de Osa - www.osaconservation.org

Arte Caushas Boruca on Instagram:

@artecaushasboruca



HOFFMANN'S TWO-TOED SLOTH

MICHAEL RUDD ————— AUTHOR BIO



Michael Rudd is an adventure photographer and writer. His career began in 1999 as the Features Editor for Four-Wheeler Magazine and he quickly established a niche in the industry by covering off-road races (including the Baja 1000 and Malaysia Rainforest Challenge), overland expeditions, and wild adventures in some of the most remote places on earth. Michael's exploits have taken him from the heights of Khardung La, a high mountain pass in the Himalayas of northern India at 17,582' – to Ushuaia Tierra Del Fuego, the southernmost city in the world. He has driven in the most extreme conditions on the planet, including the frozen wastelands of Hekla volcano in Iceland and the treacherous ice road to Tuktoyaktuk, Northwest Territories, Canada. His work has been published in OutdoorX4, Four-Wheeler, Expedition Portal, Rovers North, Overland Journal, Truck Trends, 4x4 Asia, Hawaii and Nevada Magazines. Michael resides in Colorado and Costa Rica with his wife, Breck. They spend several months each year exploring hard-to-reach destinations throughout Central and South America with four-wheel drive vehicles.

Follow Michael's adventures from his website at www.ruddfotos.com or on Facebook at @ruddfotos

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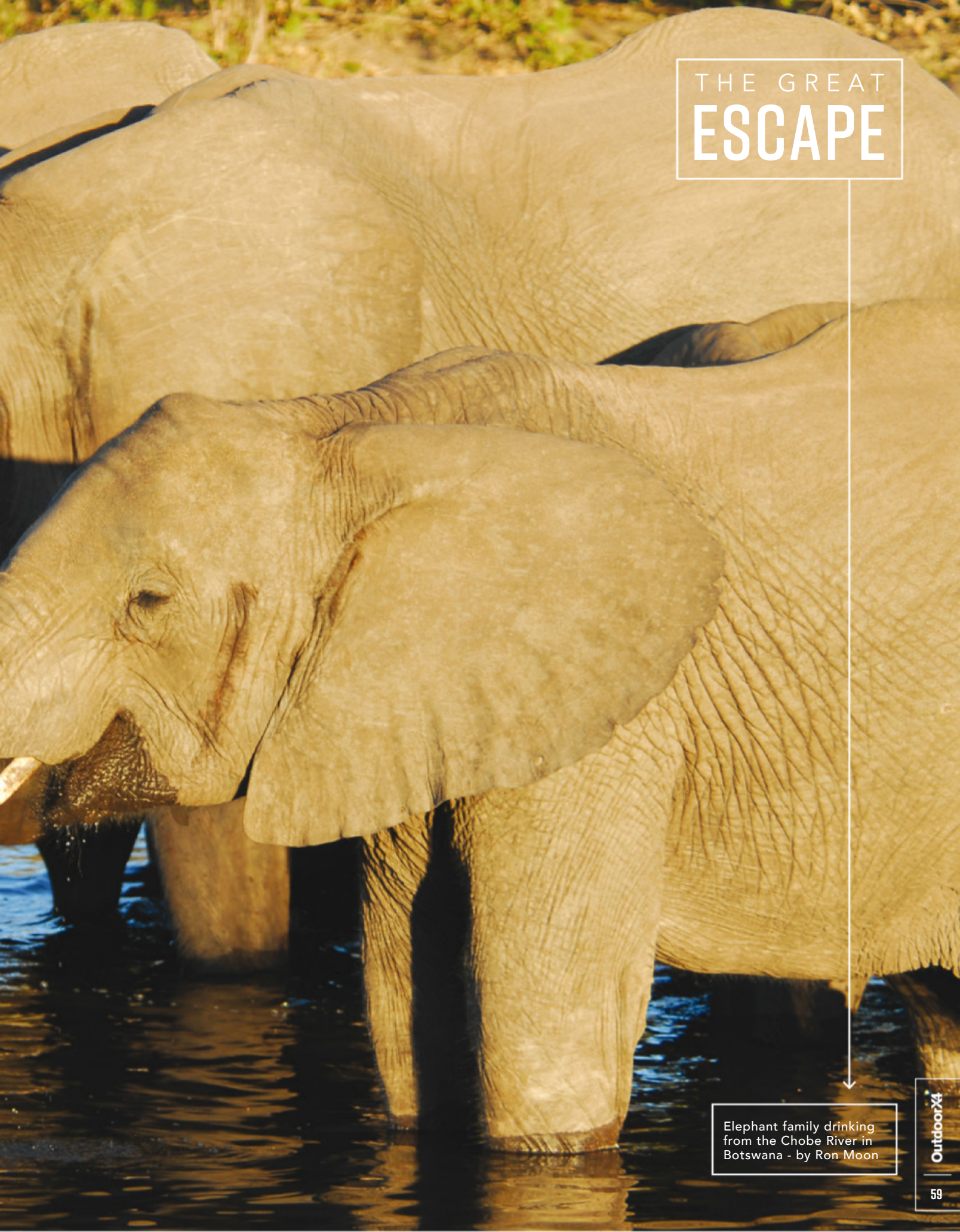
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THE GREAT ESCAPE

Elephant family drinking
from the Chobe River in
Botswana - by Ron Moon

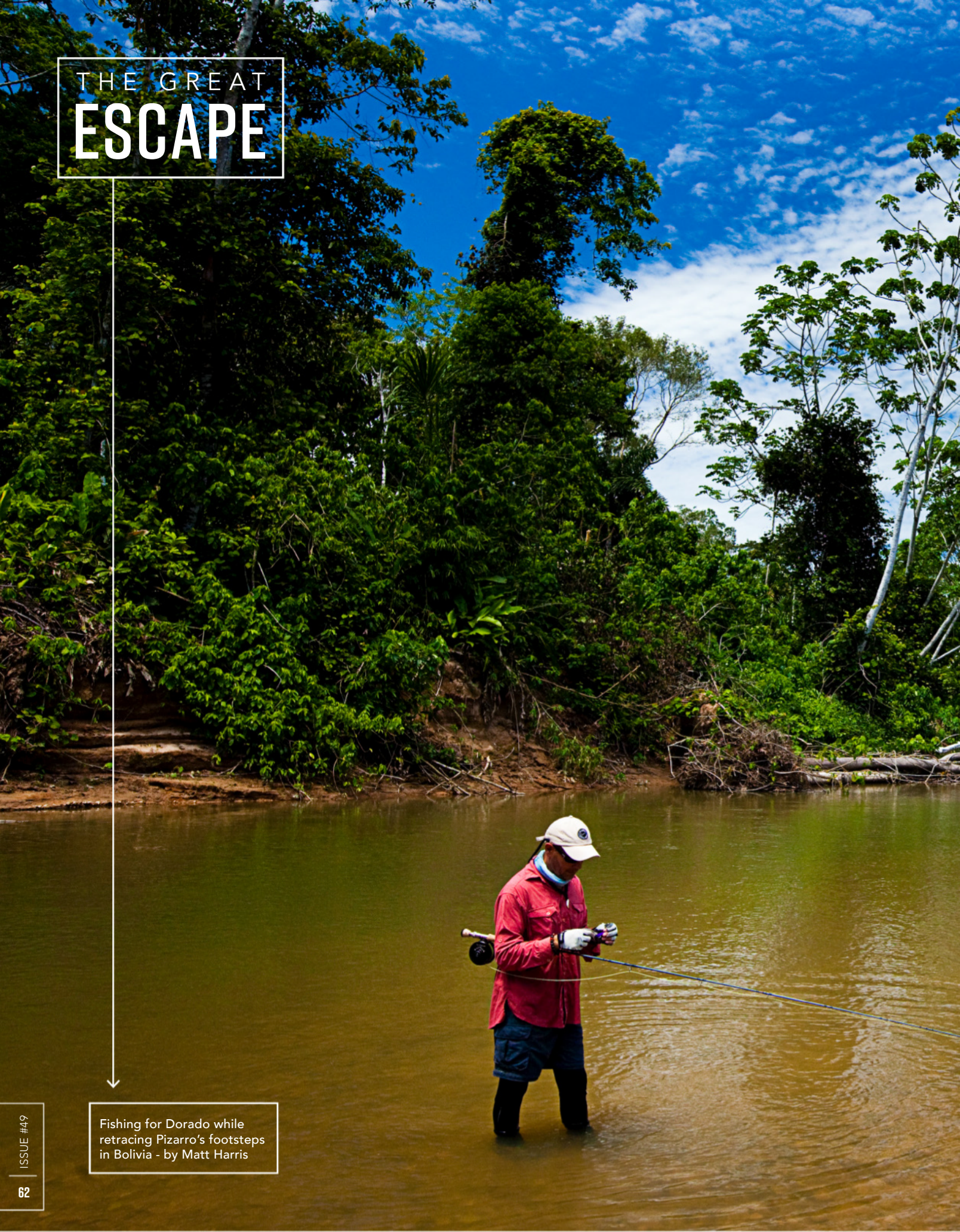
THE GREAT ESCAPE





Exploring the Salar de Atacama while navigating through North and South America - by Javier Roig

THE GREAT ESCAPE

A man in a red jacket, white cap, and dark shorts is standing in a shallow, muddy river, fishing with a rod and reel. The background is a dense, lush green forest under a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds. A white line with an arrow points from the title 'THE GREAT ESCAPE' down to the fishing scene.

Fishing for Dorado while
retracing Pizarro's footsteps
in Bolivia - by Matt Harris



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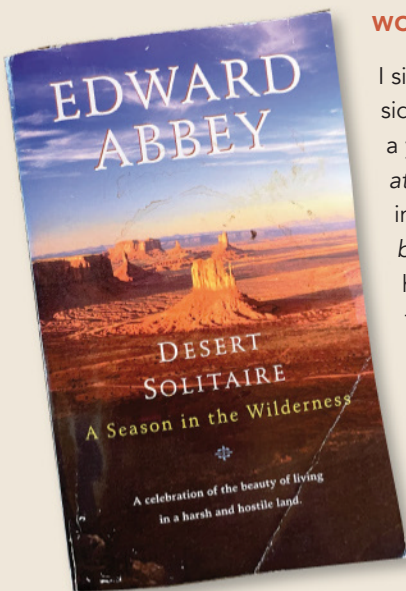
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TREADMARKS

Blinded by the Noise

WORDS - BILL DRAGOO | PHOTOS - SUSAN DRAGOO



I sit looking at my bookshelf, considering the ones which influenced a younger me. Richard Bach's *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* fueled an initial desire for flight and *Nothing by Chance*, the story of a summer he spent barnstorming across the country in an old biplane, set me on a path of flying my own antique airplane into a life of adventure amongst the clouds.

Louis L'Amour's knuckle and skull heroes made me want to be one as I sat waiting for my charter passengers in pilot's lounges across the country,

hanging on his every word. Suddenly, Ed Abbey's *Desert Solitaire* catches my eye. A worn-out copy was first loaned to me by a friend. Norm had disappeared shortly after high school, somewhere out west, returning months later as mysteriously as he had left. Showing up on my doorstep one day he simply said, "Hi," and acted like he'd only been gone a day

or two. He presented the book without fanfare. The cover was ripped off and the pages were limp and torn from rough travel. The author was an environmental activist and a lover of the deserts of the Great Southwest. He was also a ranger in Arches National Monument (now National Park) in the late '50s. Abbey lamented the changes which would bring hordes to Arches National Park and many other wonders of the desert. Paved roads were being built where a four-wheel drive truck or strong legs were then required to approach these precious natural formations.

I pull the book from the shelf and begin to read. Even after a half century, several excerpts still wield power. In the introduction Abbey tells us, "Do not jump into your automobile next June and rush out to the Canyon country hoping to see some of that which I have attempted to evoke in these pages. In the first place, you can't see *anything* from a car; you've got to get out of the (expletive) contraption and walk, better yet crawl, on hands and knees, over the sandstone and through the thornbush and cactus. When traces of blood begin to mark your trail you'll see something, maybe. Probably not. In the second place, most of what I write is already gone or going under fast. This is not a

travel guide but an elegy. A memorial. You're holding a tombstone in your hands. A bloody rock. Don't drop it on your foot--- throw it at something big and glassy. What do you have to lose?"

In his later book, *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, Abbey goes on an all-out rampage of sabotage, protesting construction of a highway through the desert. Most responsible citizens would not advocate destruction of property, even to prevent what they see as destruction of nature, but those who have witnessed the damage mindless tourists and government entities bent on maximizing effortless access have caused might share some of his frustration.

Add modern vehicles which easily carry us virtually anywhere with a chest of beer in back, flashing lights and 10,000-watt stereo amplifiers, and the obliteration of desert solitude is nearly complete.

But all is not lost. Even with our fabulous machines and groomed roads, there are still plenty of places and ways to find peace among the cactus and sage. As advocates for thoughtful and ongoing public land use, we can be the catalyst for others to behave as they should. Certainly, the prize that awaits us is worth the effort. Abbey talks about one of them, his campfire. "The odor of burning juniper is the sweetest fragrance on the face of the earth, in my honest judgment. I doubt if all the smoking censers of Dante's paradise could equal it. One breath of juniper smoke, like the perfume of sagebrush after rain, evokes in magical catalysis, like certain music, the space and light and clarity and piercing strangeness of the American West. Long may it burn."

Leaving his campfire, he makes his way back to his little aluminum trailer parked miles from any other human being. He chooses not to light his "electrical torch," but instead to let his eyes adjust to the ambient light produced by the heavens. "Like many other mechanical gadgets it (his flashlight) tends to separate a man from the world around him. If I switch it on, my eyes adapt to it and I can only see the small pool of light which it makes in front of me; I am isolated."

Once back in his trailer, he decides to write himself a letter. He must go outside again and, using a hand crank, start up the four-cylinder gasoline generator. "The engine sputters, gasps, catches fire, gains momentum, winds up into a roar, valves popping, rockers thumping, pistons hissing up and down inside their oiled jackets. Power surges into the wiring, the light bulbs inside the trailer begin to glow, brighten, becoming incandescent. The lights are so bright I can't see a thing...nor can I hear anything but the clatter of the generator. I am shut off from the natural world and sealed up, encapsulated, in a box of artificial light and tyrannical noise."

I believe that as human beings, caught up in the noise of everyday life, we become blinded to what lies just beyond the

shadow line, voluntary prisoners, seeking silence and solace, and then we insulate ourselves from it with a barrier of comfort and convenience.

Abbey continues, "Finishing the letter, I go outside to close the switch on the generator. The light bulbs dim and disappear, the furious gnashing of pistons whimpers to a halt. Standing by the inert and helpless engine, I hear its last vibrations die like ripples on a pool somewhere beyond Delicate Arch, beyond the Yellow Cat badlands, beyond the shadow line. I wait. Now the night flows back, the mighty stillness embraces and includes me; I can see the stars again and the world of starlight. I am twenty miles or more from the nearest fellow human, but instead of loneliness I feel loveliness. Loveliness and a quiet exultation."

We are separated by our conveniences from the very reason we choose to go overlanding, but it is within our power to regain our solitude. Using our machines to bring us within striking distance of the wonders of the American West, we can drive and act responsibly, sticking to established trails and keeping our rigs quiet. Once there, we can turn them off, douse the lights and listen, perhaps even go for a walk. The night will flow back again and with it, the solitude that saves us. **X4**



ABOUT BILL DRAGOO

Bill embraces adventure travel in many forms – two-wheeled, four-wheeled, and on foot. As long as it involves experiencing more of the great outdoors he is hard-pressed to resist an opportunity. When Bill's not tackling the toughest trails in the Rockies on his adventure motorcycle he's busy exploring with his wife, Susan, in their Toyota 4Runner, the "GS of Trucks."

Among his many pursuits, Bill is an MSF-certified riding instructor and BMW Motorrad Certified Off Road Instructor, and owns/operates the DART (Dragoo Adventure Rider Training) school near the Dragoos' hometown of Norman. Bill was a member of the 2010 BMW GS Trophy team, representing the United States in competition in Africa.

You can join Bill for one of his training classes by visiting www.billdragoo.com.



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A Journey to South Georgia Island

Going to the Ends of the Earth to Visit a Truly Wild Place

WORDS & PHOTOS – KRAIG BECKER



When I tell people I've been to South Georgia Island, most will ask if that is anywhere near Savannah. When I say that it is actually located in a remote part of the Southern Ocean, roughly 1,200 miles from Antarctica, the inevitable follow-up question is: Why would anyone want to go to such a place? The answer to that is a simple one: Most people wouldn't want to go there. But those that do seldom come home unchanged.

South Georgia is a place that is unknown to most people. But adventurous travelers and fans of the history of Antarctic exploration regard the island with an undeniable reverence. First discovered by a merchant vessel in 1675 and later claimed for King George III, it became a British overseas territory. The island remained mostly unexplored and uninhabited until the nineteenth century when it became an important base of operations for whalers.



But the island is probably best known for its role in the story of Ernest Shackleton, a prominent figure during the Golden Age of Antarctic Exploration. In 1914, the Irish explorer set out to become the first person to cross the frozen continent, stopping at South Georgia for supplies before embarking on his ambitious expedition. But Shackleton and his crew — aboard the ship *Endurance* — never made it to Antarctica. Instead, they spent ten months trapped in the frozen Weddell Sea before their vessel was crushed and sent to the bottom of the sea.

Before that happened, Shackleton and his men abandoned the ship and set up camp on a large ice floe. They stayed there for another five months before using lifeboats to reach a desolate place called Elephant Island, where they survived by eating seal meat. Realizing that a rescue was unlikely, the Irish explorer and a handpicked team made a daring open ocean crossing, spending sixteen days at sea to return to South Georgia Island in search of help.

Miraculously, Shackleton and his men reached their destination but found themselves stranded on the wrong side of the island. He and two other crew members then set out to traverse the rugged and barren landscape, eventually reaching a whaling station and the assistance they were seeking. That last desperate trek has become the stuff of legend and remains incredibly difficult today, even when using modern gear.

It took a few more months for Shackleton to return to Elephant Island to rescue the remaining crew of the *Endurance*. All told, the ordeal lasted twenty months, but remarkably not a single man died, making this one of the greatest survival stories in history. Sadly, Shackleton suffered a heart attack on a subsequent expedition to the Antarctic a few years later, dying en route. He was then buried on South Georgia, where his grave remains to this day.

Today, South Georgia is once again primarily uninhabited. The British maintain a small research station and naval base there, with about twenty people on duty at any given time. They welcome the occasional Antarctic cruise ship, which brings eager adventurers to this quiet corner of the globe. Those visitors find the remains of several whaling stations, a small museum, and one of the southernmost churches in the world.

Just getting to South Georgia can be an adventure. Most ships visiting the island depart from the city of Ushuaia in Argentina's Patagonia region. That means crossing the Drake Passage, one of the most treacherous and turbulent stretches of ocean on the planet. Because no land masses are located at that latitude, the ocean currents are unimpeded, creating a barrier between the Atlantic and Southern Oceans. For centuries, sailors have avoided those waters whenever possible, as the rough seas are challenging for ships and passengers alike.





My journey to South Georgia began by catching a ship out of Ushuaia bound for the Falkland Islands. From there, we turned south to start our crossing of the “Drake Shake,” entering the Southern Ocean after two wild days at sea that kept many passengers confined to their cabins. But on the other side, we were met with relatively calm waters punctuated with cold southerly breezes.

The Southern Ocean also greeted us with another welcome sight — whales. Once hunted to near-extinction for the oil contained in their blubber, these great sea mammals are now making a comeback in the waters off the coast of Antarctica. During the five-day journey to South Georgia, it was not uncommon to catch a glimpse of these massive creatures breaking the surface alongside the ship. Throughout the voyage, we spotted humpbacks, southern right whales, sperm whales, and even a few blue whales—the largest creatures ever to inhabit our planet.

Things only got more wondrous upon arrival at South Georgia. The island’s snowcapped peaks appeared on the horizon, a series of jagged, 8,000’ mountains stretching skyward like daggers from the sea. Even from a distance, the shoreline seems dramatic and foreboding, with low-hanging clouds casting a shroud of mystery across the landscape.

A century after Shackleton’s final voyage to South Georgia, his shadow still looms large over the island. Most visitors know his

story well and make the pilgrimage hoping to follow in the Irish explorer’s illustrious footsteps. Many begin their visit at the former whaling station of Grytviken, which sits not far from the British outpost. There, they find a small museum that shares insights into the history of the place, including Shackleton’s remarkable story of survival. A short walk away is the local graveyard, where a headstone marks the final resting spot of the legendary man himself.

Despite regular visits from passing tourist ships, South Georgia remains as wild and isolated as ever. The best way to experience its remote beauty is on foot, hiking along routes meant for adventurous trekkers. One such route follows the final hours of Shackleton’s march across the island as he searched for aid for his men. The path wanders through rocky highlands and past icy lakes before descending steeply into a wide, flat valley below. The trail ends along the coast at the remains of a village once known as Stromness. It was there that Shackleton and his companions wandered into camp, completely unrecognizable after spending nearly twenty months missing in the Antarctic.

In Shackleton’s era, the Southern Ocean was a vast hunting ground for whalers. But much has changed since then, with the waters off the coast of South Georgia now a designated wildlife refuge. Whales frequently gather in those once-dangerous seas, and elephant and fur seals line the beaches. The island is home



to a number of rare bird species, too, including the wandering albatross and the Antarctic petrel. Visitors can also spot plenty of penguins there, with gentoos, rockhoppers, and macaronis common along the shores.

But the island's most stunning display of wildlife is found at a place called St. Andrews Bay. There, travelers will find one of the largest king penguin colonies in the world, with a population of over 200,000. The bay is one of the primary breeding grounds for the flightless birds, which stand up to three feet in height when fully grown. Seeing so many of those awkward but lovable creatures lining the beach is a memorable sight, indeed. It's one that stays with you long after you've left South Georgia behind.

Eventually, everyone leaves South Georgia, including those that man the British naval base and research station. But nearly everyone who visits this place takes a little something with them when they go – whether it is the reminder of the resilience of man found in the Shackleton story or the reassurance that there are still some wild, untamed places on our planet. It is a place that embodies all of those things and more, calling all world travelers and would-be adventurers to its shores.

But beware. Should you heed that call, you likely won't escape unchanged. And this South Georgia is a world away from Savannah. **X4**



KRAIG BECKER

AUTHOR BIO

Kraig is a freelance writer who covers travel, outdoor gear, and technology. He has contributed to such outlets as Popular Mechanics, Business Insider, GearJunkie, Digital Trends, Outside magazine, National Geographic, and countless others. He lives in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Roanoke, VA where he is an avid trail runner, mountain biker, and hiker.





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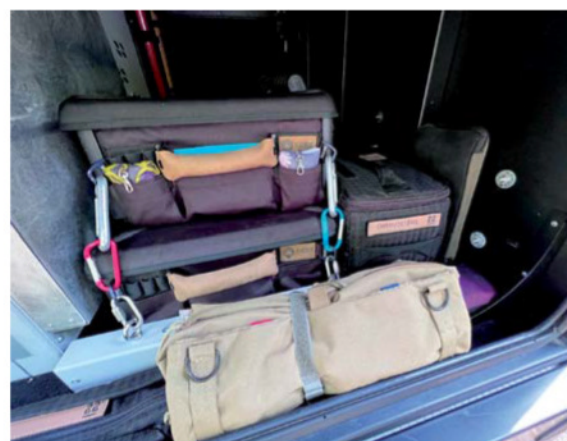
Vehicle History

In 1999, we bought a 1997 Jeep Wrangler JT, and started driving off-road and tent camping. Space and storage in the Jeep were a challenge, but we still managed to explore all over Texas, primarily in the Big Bend area.

In 2012, we bought a Jeep Wrangler Rubicon 4 Door Unlimited JK and bought an Adventure Trailer Horizon trailer (now known as AT Overland) to pull behind the JK that had an Eezi-Awn rooftop tent, solar battery controller and battery, eighteen-gallon water tank, two five-gallon fuel tanks, propane and propane stove, National Luna fridge, and more room for storage. This was our early introduction to "overlanding." The Jeep was outfitted with a Front Runner Slimline roof rack and Wolf Pack cargo boxes, AEV rear fuel tank behind the spare tire, and a variety of additional mods specifically for off-road use. We went to our first Overland Expo in Flagstaff in 2013, taking from that experience lessons learned to allow us to travel extensively throughout Arizona, Utah, and Texas. Our premier trip was a three-week, summer road trip throughout Utah, with over one week spent in Canyonlands in the Maze District. We saw no one during that time period. We enjoyed the convenience of the trailer and the vehicle separately, since we could set up camp and still roam in the Jeep. The trailer did present different challenges of maneuverability in tight spaces, but it was manageable. We ultimately did an LS3 engine swap in the JK because the stock engine was starting to fail, and even though we kept it for another two years, we never gained enough confidence in the new setup to take it on far-away trips at that point.

In 2020, we bought a Jeep Gladiator with the intention to build it out as a self-contained overlanding vehicle. This would eliminate the need for a trailer. Also, we liked the idea that everything was fully contained as one unit so we could keep it packed and essentially ready to go. We had traveled extensively in Australia and had become interested in modified trucks with rear canopies thus leading us to Patriot Campers and their PCOR tray and canopy. At that point, COVID hit which meant delays in shipments and build processes; however, we finally got everything put together the way we wanted it. My wife and I still like the fully self-contained idea despite the fact that it limits our ability to move around in the vehicle. Additionally, we still have the AT Horizon trailer and have pulled it behind the PCOR Gladiator when we've been on extended trips that have required the additional storage. The PCOR Gladiator is a much bigger and heavier beast than the JK and trailer setup, so driving off-road requires a different approach and in some cases, has had its limits where we take it. Nevertheless, my wife and I enjoy driving the vehicle every day and on long trips, and it has proven to be a vehicle built to accommodate all our adventures.





NOTABLE TRIPS IN THE PCOR GLADIATOR

- Northern New Mexico and Gila National Forest
- Portions of the Idaho BDR across the Lolo Trail
- Owyhee Canyonlands in southeastern Oregon
- Texas Big Bend region



Upgrades to our PCOR Gladiator:

- Magnuson Supercharger
- Rock Krawler 3" Suspension
- AirLift Air Bag System
- Hellwig Rear Sway bar
- RCV axle shafts
- 4.88 gears
- AEV differential covers
- Adams 1310 front driveshaft
- Toyo Open Country M/T Tires 37x12.5x17 (5)
- Black Rhino Armory Gunblack Wheels
- Fox 3.0 Factory Series rear shocks
- Heavy duty rear springs
- ARB Dual Compressor (mounted under passenger seat)
- Rockslide Engineering retractable sidesteps
- ARB Safari Snorkel
- Smittybilt Atlas Hinge steps
- Eezi-Awn K9 Roof Rack
- K9 Maxtrax (x4) mounted on roof
- IBS Dual Battery System with two Optima batteries
- COTEK 1000W Inverter in PCOR
- REDARC Electronics Tow Pro Elite Brake controller
- Tazer Mini Programming Module
- sPOD Bantam X System with HD Switch Panel
- Bodyguard A-pillar brackets
- Rigid Industries E-Series 50" Lightbar
- Rigid Industries Scene Lights (side and rear of PCOR)
- KC HiLites Cyclone rock lights
- Rigid Industries Q-Series spot lights with amber covers in front bumper
- Maximus-3 winch mount
- Warn Zeon 12-S Platinum Winch, front, with wireless controller
- Factor 55 fairlead and flatlink
- Cascadia 4x4 Flipster License Plate Mount
- Warn 9.5 XP-S Winch, Rear with Factor 55 Fairlead and Flatlink, wired and wireless controller
- JCR Offroad interior MOLLE panels
- Vector Offroad E-Dock
- Midland MXT400 40W Micromobile GMRS Radio with Ghost Antenna
- weBoost Drive Reacher OTR and Antenna Cell Signal Extender
- James Baroud Evasion Evolution Rooftop Tent
- James Baroud Falcon 270 awning with tunnel and sidewalls
- Eezi Awn K9 Cube Shower
- Racksbrax Quick Release Mounts
- Patriot Camper Offroad (PCOR) Gladiator Tray and ¾ Canopy
- 18 Gallon water tank in PCOR with spigot and water pump
- Dometic Fridge in PCOR
- Alu-Boxes – two mounted to roof rack for general storage
- Alu-box – quick release bracket for additional storage box on roof
- Garmin Overlander mounted at rear view mirror location
- Garmin In-Reach mounted on dash
- REDARC Manager30 Power Control System in PCOR
- 100ah LiFePO4 battery
- Progeny 120W portable solar panel
- Step 22 and Radius Outfitters storage bags
- PCOR spare tire and jerry can mounts
- Custom propane mount
- Safe Jack 6 ton bottle jack system
- Dynamat installed throughout interior to reduce road noise
- Maximus 3 Satellite antenna relocation
- Long Range America extended range 17-gallon fuel tank
- MetalCloak chromoly tie rod
- Duro Track chromoly track bar
- Element E50 Fire Extinguisher **X4**

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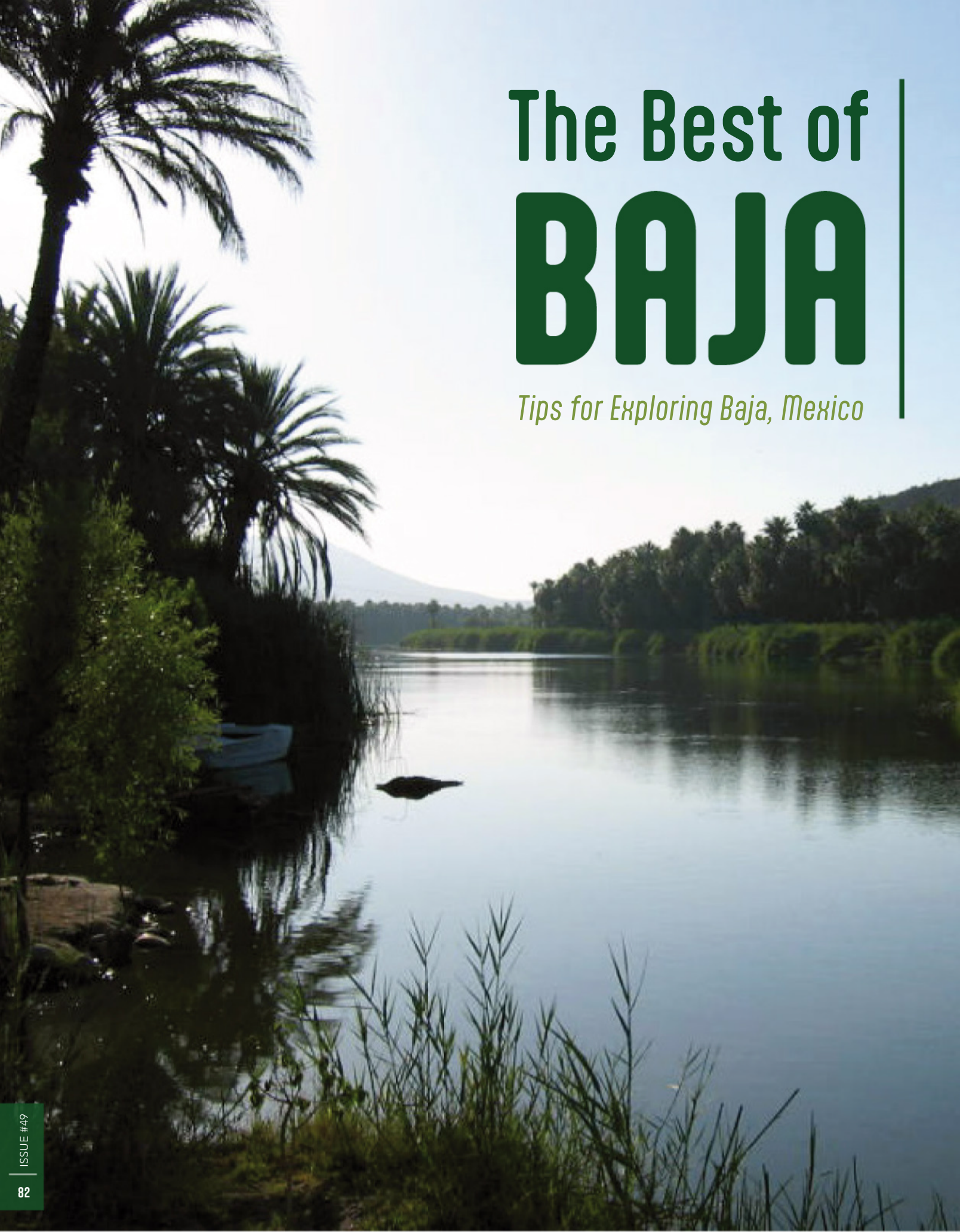
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A scenic landscape of a calm lake in Baja, Mexico. The water is still, reflecting the sky and the surrounding greenery. On the left, several palm trees and other tropical plants are silhouetted against the bright sky. In the background, a range of mountains is visible under a clear blue sky. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and serene.

The Best of BAJA

Tips for Exploring Baja, Mexico



It is early morning in a private pirate cove off the Sea of Cortez. The heat waves from the asphalt of central Baja have been replaced with a single small wave that laps the beach. The rear end of our camper is but a few feet away. I look out the window trying not to wake my wife. Three sailboats are moored offshore. The sun has just peaked over the horizon casting light rays across the water and reflecting off their masts. With each minute, the morning gets older. It is dead calm except for the sound of a few gulls on a nearby island. I wonder what is on the other side. A perfect day for kayaking. I need to remember to put tamales in our lunch.

WORDS & PHOTOS - GARY AND GRETCHEN MATOS

I remember the day well. It was a cold March morning in Sisters, Oregon. My good friend Rick and I were enjoying a cup of coffee at a shop named after our town. That is what you do when the temperature is below 20 degrees. Pictures of warm days, white sand and glass-like turquoise bays framed our conversation. Rick had just ordered his Four-Wheel Camper Hawk. He was excited and wanted to talk about its maiden voyage to Baja MX. The prospect of exploring remote beaches and sampling new tequila would make the wait for his camper tolerable. He had visited Baja before and the pull to return was as good and strong as the dark-roasted coffee.

A middle-aged couple at a nearby table overheard our conversation. They leaned over and seemed to ask in unison *'Is it safe to travel in Baja MX? We have always wanted to go but were unsure.'* It is a question and statement Gretchen and I hear often. Rick raised the same concern before his first trip to Baja. Our short answer has not changed. *'We believe so, but some knowledge can certainly reduce the risk.'*

We were first introduced to Baja California 20 years ago. An opportunity surfaced to build a casita (small home) in a sleepy fishing village an hour from the tip of the peninsula. For more than a decade, we enjoyed the community and made a lot of friends. Sunrises over the Sea of Cortez were always breathtaking and especially memorable while motoring to our favorite fishing grounds. After retirement, we began taking our time driving the length of Baja. What was once a four-day 2200 mile marathon drive from Oregon, quickly extended to four weeks. We started meandering down the peninsula and discovered many previously unseen treasures. We explored Baja rather than just drove it. One day, we traveled only two miles before we saw another quiet cove to land for a day or three. The journey had finally become the destination. Our camper became home.

Each trip to Baja is a little different. One year we may be traveling alone and the next with a group of friends. That keeps it fresh and fun. Three years ago, the wildflower bloom and colorful cactus near the oasis of Catavina was simply captivating. On the Bay of Concepcion, we have witnessed days on end when the only ripple on the water was from a kayak. In Guerrero Negro, the whales have welcomed a boat-side scratch while in Magdalena Bay we have bought fresh blue shrimp and scallops

for dimes on the dollar. Mulege, San Carlos and La Ventana are but a few towns in Baja that always surprise. After countless miles and a few trials, we always return to Baja wanting more.

Traveling in Baja for the first time can be a little unsettling, especially while navigating the border towns. The following tips are not meant to be comprehensive or definitive. They are simply a collection of key learnings that have served us and friends well over the years. We have also provided several travel destinations that will give you a good flavor of Baja. Gretchen and I hope they provide some guidance and insight so that you may enjoy Baja as much as we do.

VEHICLE PREPARATION:

In Baja, you will see everything from tent campers to large diesel-pusher RVs and an occasional Unimog based international overlander. The vehicle type is largely dependent on your travel preferences. If you plan to stay on MX 1 (the main highway which runs the length of the peninsula) or well-known secondary roads, then small or large 2WD vehicles will perform well. However, if your desire is to explore the smaller towns or missions, or camp on pristine beaches then a higher clearance 4WD rig is required.

Aside from early Jeep trips, almost all of our Baja overlanding has been done in a Toyota Tacoma equipped with a Four-Wheel Camper (FWC) Fleet. We like this setup for several reasons. It is reliable, lightweight and very capable. We are able to seek out campsites that are off limit to larger rigs. Driving up sand filled arroyos lined with boulders or low limbed mesquite trees to view ancient petroglyphs is part of the adventure. Many of the best beaches require you to travel in and out of washes or over rock rough terrain (that will present a problem for low clearance vehicles). Make sure your rig adequately matches your travel expectations and needs. For example, when a trip calls for kayaks, motorcycles or extra gear, we tow our rugged 'Baja Buggy' trailer. However, this configuration can limit our exploration or camping options.

Regardless of your vehicle, make sure it is serviced before crossing the border. Tires should be new or have plenty of tread left. Change or fill fluids and inspect all hoses. Check the condition of your battery. Although vehicles can be serviced by competent mechanics in Baja, there are long stretches of highway where



even small towns are scarce. There are also a few accessories to consider. An air compressor, tire pressure gauge and traction boards are invaluable for washboards, arroyos and the beaches. A spare gas can(s) will get you that extra 30 miles and a tire repair or plug kit can keep you rolling. Diesel #2 is available at almost every Pemex station in Baja. (Make sure when filling up that the attendant [first] resets the gas meter to zero.) If you drive a newer diesel, carry extra DEF as it is rarely found in smaller towns.

When to Travel: After years of traveling Baja, Gretchen and I prefer two seasonal windows: Fall and spring. October and November are a good time for several reasons. The weather is moderate with little wind and the hurricane season has passed. The beaches are quiet. The majority of the annual migration of snowbirds will not arrive for another month. We also like April. The snowbirds head north, and the winds begin to subside. There are more glass-like days on the Sea of Cortez. Temperatures are usually in the 80's. Perfect conditions for kayaking and fishing.

Documents and Border Crossings: A decade or more ago, you could spend a lot of time at the Mexican border filling out visa paperwork, finding a bank to pay the fees and then returning to customs to get your passport stamped. Thankfully, companies like Discover Baja (<https://www.discoverbaja.com/>) make the border crossing a lot easier. For a nominal annual membership, they will pre-process all your paperwork and fees about a month prior to your departure. At the border, you will only need to have your passport stamped. Discover Baja also offers automobile insurance and provides a help line.

There are three primary border crossings into Baja. If you are more interested in San Felipe and getting south to the Sea of Cortez quickly, then we would recommend going through Mexicali. With a little luck, you could cross the border at 8am and be enjoying a beer in Bahia de Los Angeles by 2pm. If you are interested in Baja's wine country, the Ruta de Vina is best

reached through Tecate. Tecate is an easy border crossing with only two turns and 10 miles before you get into the countryside. Ensenada and the Pacific Ocean are less than two hours away. We hesitate to suggest Tijuana. It is simply too congested.

Before crossing the border, we advise that you leave a copy of your travel documents, passport and Mexican insurance with a friend in the USA. Also, make a good, laminated color copy of your driver's license and carry that with you. If asked by the Policia show them the copy.

Bring a good map of Baja and a GPS loaded with the proper maps. The Baja Almanac, if you can still find one, is the gold standard for overlanding. However, Discover Baja now offers an atlas that is also very good.

Finally, we advise that you obtain several thousand pesos (about \$150 USD) prior to crossing the border so that you have some 'working cash' at the start of your trip. All along the Baja peninsula there are banks like Banamex or HSBC that have ATMs with reasonable exchange rates.

Obey the Tope and Military Checkpoints: In Mexico, a speed bump is called a Tope (pronounced Toe Pay). They vary from large mounds across the highway or painted stripes. A Tope can also appear in the most remote locations. From a distance it is often difficult to discern what you will encounter. One thing is certain, you will misjudge a tope sooner or later. After a surprise encounter with a rather large tope near Loretto, Gretchen and I were busy for the next hour putting everything back into the camper cupboards.

Each year, the roads in Baja get better. The new highway that runs from Mexicali to MX 1 is well constructed and even includes passing lanes. However, most of MX 1 is a two-lane highway with little to no shoulder and tire pounding potholes. There are also mountainous curves leading in and out of central Baja that



The storm had blown through. Our time in Mulege was rich and productive. We pressed through emails while munching through lunch at the local internet café. The camper refrigerator, water and propane tanks were at capacity. But our pleasant disinterest in time was now capturing our attention. We needed to get down the road. Two hours later, daylight was beginning to wane as we approached a place to camp. The beach looked peaceful, but I was not. I had a growing concern over a severely bent suspension support bracket. It would not survive another day of roads rock-washed from arroyos. 'No Service' on my cell phone seemed a little larger than usual. At 7pm I contacted Ralph, who lives in Baja, on my Ham radio and explained the situation. He would be at my location the next morning – welder in hand – if I could not get it repaired at a 'taller de soldadura' (welding shop). Good communications are invaluable.

require your complete attention. It is not uncommon to see a lone cow or two beside the road. Except for a few lights in the small towns, the Baja desert is dark and lonely. For all these reasons, avoid driving at night.

There are approximately eight military checkpoints along the 1000-mile drive of the Baja peninsula. Although they can be a little intimidating for the first-time traveler, they exist for good reasons – to prevent movement of illegal substances, weapons and / or persons. It is common to be waived through during the drive south but expect some delays on the return north. You will typically be greeted by a military soldier and asked, 'Where are you coming from and where you are going?'. ('De donde viene y a donde va?'). You may also be asked to open your camper ('Abre tu caravan por favor'). We have experienced everything from a cursory inspection to a thorough search of our camper. We have a few recommendations: Be courteous and honest and if traveling alone, request they complete the cab inspection before moving to the camper so you can be present. While we do not condone any form of bribery, if the conditions are hot, offering a bottle of water is a nice gesture. Most of the soldiers are young men from mainland Mexico and they warm to a little kindness and respect.

Finally, learn a few common, situational, Spanish phrases. On a recent trip, a friend was so nervous at the checkpoint that when asked to turn off his engine, he said 'No hablo English'. (I do not speak any English.) Needless to say, we got some mileage out of that funny moment.

Food, Water, Propane and Cerveza: One of the delectable delights of Baja is the food. It is plentiful and inexpensive. We often tell first time travelers to pack only enough food to get them to the border and one or two days beyond. There really is no need to stuff your refrigerator and storage compartments with extra food – unless you have special dietary needs. Once

below the border towns, we usually do a grocery stop at one of the larger stores like Calimax. They have a large selection of fresh meats and vegetables, and their bakery produces some mouth-watering treats. Finding that special item, which you cannot get in the states can be a lot of fun.

Water quality and availability can be another concern of travelers. In general, we avoid drinking water from spigots or similar sources and always ask for bottled water in restaurants. Every grocery store, mini-mercado (small market) or gas station carries small and large bottles of water. Larger cities like San Quintin, Mulege and Constitution (to name a few) have Agua-Purificada stations where you can fill your rig with potable water for pennies a gallon. You will need to look around a little for propane. It is readily available but filling locations are generally tucked away. Of course, there is always beer. A trip through any Baja town will reveal mini-mercado's painted in the colors of Tecate, Pacifico, Modelo and Dos Equis. Be sure to ask for their coldest selection... 'Donde esta tu cerveza que es mas fria?'



Communications: Much of Baja now has cell coverage. That was not the case a decade ago. Even today, cell service in cities like Bahia de Los Angeles and stretches of the Bay of Concepcion, or between Constitution and La Paz, is at best intermittent or non-existent. Check with your US-based service provider for MX plans. In recent years, Verizon and ATT have partnered with MX carriers to improve coverage. When cell service is not available, you should consider alternative solutions – especially in an emergency. A SAT phone or a simple GPS Satellite locator, like a Garmin In Reach can let others know how you are doing or signal for help. Of course, Ham radio is an excellent option but requires a license to operate. (Using an application like Winlink, I can even send emails over my Ham radio.)

When traveling Baja in a group, we always use mobile radios. They are great for pointing out sights of interest, identifying road hazards or requesting fuel or food stops. The new class of GRMS and FRS radios perform very well and are inexpensive. Even a CB works well for short distances and the Mexican truckers love them!

Some Final Tips: Put on your Baja goggles. If you have limited travel experience in poorer countries, it may take a little time adjusting to some of the conditions. We find this is easily offset by the natural beauty of the area and the kind people we meet along the way.

Camping facilities in Baja are commonly referred to as RV Parks. Some have dedicated spots with palapa shade covers, WiFi cafes and clean showers. Others are a dirt lot with suspect water and rudimentary pit toilets. All the locations that we recommend are fairly clean by Baja standards and are routinely frequented by Americans and Canadians. Just remember that the presence of an electrical outlet does not necessarily mean it has power and bathrooms do not always have toilet paper. No problema... bring your own!

Until you are comfortable traveling in Baja, we recommend that you do not camp alone. Simply stated, you will have a more relaxing time. If a potential campsite off the highway looks too good to be true and no one is around, there may be a reason. Gretchen and I have spent many nights boon docking alone in Baja and feel very safe. However, we know the area and always camp where we cannot be seen or easily accessed from a main highway.

A ROAD TOUR OF BAJA

We have stayed at each of the following places we describe. This list is designed as a starting point for a traveler that is relatively new to Baja. Ensenada and San Felipe are not covered as these towns are close to the border and can be considered a day trip. Similarly, the San Jose / Cabo area is not covered as these areas are easily accessed by flights and tend to have an abundance of tourists. Therefore, our focus starts about 200 miles south of the border and extends down to La Paz.

San Quintin is a 6-hour drive from the Tecate border. Located near the Pacific Ocean, this community is one of the agricultural hubs of Baja. It is also the town that never ends. Main Street, along MX 1, extends for 10 miles! On the southern end, there are several RV Parks and hotels. The most popular are El Pabelon and Mission Santa Maria. For safety reasons, avoid camping on the beach south of El Socorro.

Catavina is a stunning, boulder strewn, oasis in the Central Baja desert and an archeological gem with numerous petroglyph sites. It is also home to the rare, and the almost comical, cirrio cactus. Many visitors stay at the Rancho Santa Ines RV Park – a large parking area with mesquite trees that provide shade. This park is also the gateway to Mission Santa Maria but be prepared for some serious off-roading to reach the mission ruins. The last downhill stretch is called 'The Widow Maker' for a reason! The desert sunsets and night sky are always special. You can cut the Milky Way with a knife. If you prefer some amenities, then the Hotel Mission Catavina is a good choice.

Bahia de Los Angeles is only a 6 hour drive down MX 5 from Mexicali. It is the real deal. A laid-back Baja town with just enough conveniences to prolong a visit. The bay is surrounded by islands and peninsulas that jut from both ends. We typically stay at La Gringa Beach on the north end of town, about 2 miles after the pavement ends. Camping should be free but an 'appointed local' may request a very small fee to empty trash. Just don't expect much. More recently, we have preferred Camp Archelon located just beyond the 'S' turns north of town. It is very well run with good WiFi, clean bathrooms and a small café and lounge. Cost is about \$8 per day. <https://www.archelon-camp.com.mx/>

Gretchen and I were holed up in Puerto Escondido while a deluge of rain pounded the roof of our camper. Water flowed down the road like a river. We were snug and alert and waiting for the sun to break and humidity to rise. Shortly before noon we started the steep mountain climb out of Tripui and headed towards San Carlos on the Pacific. After a three-hour visual fiesta, we arrived at Mar y Arena – one of our favorite out-of-the-way stops along the Baja. It felt like a homecoming. Fito, the owner, and his chef Juan came out to greet us. Within minutes, our camper was backed up to the North end of Magdalena Bay and our chairs were pointed West in anticipation of a stunning sunset.



If you are up for a little adventure, take the road to the San Borja Mission located west of town. Established in 1762, this mission is well preserved. Plan an entire day as there are many sights to see and the rough 20-mile road can take some time to navigate. Spending the night there under some cabanas is also a good option.

Guerrero Negro is located at the divide of Baja California Norte and Sur (North and South). Travelers are greeted by a large Mexican flag (which can be seen for miles) and a military base. GN is noted for the annual arrival of gray whales that use the rich lagoons to calve. Tours are offered from several approved vendors. Tourists can usually touch a whale as they approach and roll-over beside the boat. It is a once in a lifetime experience. We like the simplicity of Mario's RV Park off MX 1 before entering town. The park is very basic but has power, water, hot showers and plenty of spaces. The restaurant is well known for their abundant seafood and lobster dinners. Mario's Eco whale watching tours leave from the restaurant.

San Ignacio is an easy 2–3-hour drive SE from Guerrero Negro. The shaded town square features a beautifully restored mission surrounded by an oasis of old buildings containing small shops and cafes. Whale tours can also be purchased here. There are many places to stay but we usually land at 'Rice and Beans'. Like many Baja Hotels, they have RV accommodations and a restaurant. Rice and Beans is a Baja 1000 Race favorite and has a lot of race history adorning the walls. The lagoon and palm groves are a just a short walk from the hotel.

Santa Rosalia is the first Baja Sur town you approach, after a thrilling downhill decent, on the Sea of Cortez. It is a wonderful old copper mining town with a lot of history and character. Gustave Eiffel (of Eiffel Tower fame) designed the church, erected by a French mining company, in the town square. Uncommon in Baja, most of the buildings are made of wood and contain plenty of balconies and window flower boxes. The European influence from early mining investors is still present. Although the streets are narrow and one-way downtown, a drive through is worth it – providing your rig is not too big. We recommend that you do not leave your rig parked unattended outside of town.

If you are looking to land on a quiet beach, then head south for about an hour to the **Punta Chavato** turn-off. After a 5-mile drive on a dirt road, you will be treated by a pristine beach with small cabanas.

Mulege is one of our favorite quintessential Baja Towns – very friendly, clean and with essential commerce. There is a small group of ex-pats but they have integrated well with the community and culture. Mulege not only has the feel of a true Mexican town but it serves as the gateway to Bahia Concepcion. Their bakery is outstanding and has good WiFi. Lee's market can fill propane bottles and their Agua Purificada is easily accessed. In short, Mulege is a great place to resupply. Buy some freshly

Puerto Cancun is completely unique... and so were the friends we were traveling with! We will never forget our first impressions. After 25 miles on a wash board road, we were greeted by a Military outpost. We then weaved through a few sandy 'S' turns and came upon a sea of tents where the local fisherman slept by day and fished by night. The gulls flying overhead were strangely quiet. It must be difficult to squawk with shrimp between beaks. Our campsite was a sliver of sand where the bay came within five feet of our backdoor. At low tide, we could walk over a mile on a hard packed ocean floor teeming with sea life. Chocolate clams and hatchet scallops were some of the prizes. From the local fisherman, we bought Mexican Blue Shrimp (the size of a small lobster) and fresh crab. In the evening, we were warmed by a mesquite-fueled campfire and a little tequila as the sound of lonely coyotes rolled over the dunes. Rarely have we seen so many stars.



made tortillas at the local 'Tortilleria'. You will be jaded forever thereafter! Take a side trip to the Mission. Enjoy some local fruit and seafood. At the south end of town, after the turn, are several RV parks and the famous Hotel Serenidad.

Santespec is a picturesque beach on the Sea of Cortez and is commonly referred to as 'Canada Sur'. The number of snowbirds that make the annual trip there is amazing. Expect a crowded beach of RVs from December through March. The local restaurant is very good and a regular stop for adventure motorcyclists. If you end up staying a night or two, do not avoid the local produce and fish vendors that come by each morning. The quality is excellent and the prices are hard to beat. We especially like the hot tamales, fresh vegetables, shrimp and halibut.

Playa Escondida is just a few miles south of Santespec. During the off season, this is one of our favorite camping spots along Bahia Concepcion. It has become a haven for international travelers and musicians alike. We have treasured the memories of several campfires in the evenings surrounded by acoustic instruments and the rhythm of lapping water. The secluded beach is typically calm and perfect for kayaking.

Playa El Requeson, another half hour south, is one of the most photographed beaches in Bahia Concepcion. The trademark white and narrow sand spit that extends from shore enables you to have a water view from the front and back of your camper! There are additional campsites to the south and a scenic hike that skirts the nearby water edge.

Recommended Reading: Before and during a trip, Gretchen and I enjoy reading about our destinations. I tend to focus on the destinations and history while Gretchen has a passion for the culture and geology of an area. Although there is a library of works on Baja, listed below are a few of our favorites:

- God and Mr. Gomez; Jack Smith; 1997
- Journey with a Baja Burro; Graham Mackintosh; 2001
- The Unforgettable Sea of Cortez; Gene Kira; 2008
- Off-Trail Adventures in Baja California; Markes Johnson; 2014

Loreto is a large town by Baja standards where you will find an abundance of RV parks, restaurants, shops and museums. The boardwalk and town square are popular destinations in the evening with plenty of shops to wander about. Many tourists resupply in Loreto but it is simply a little big for our preference. The local mission, about 10 miles outside of town is a worthwhile side trip. There is good beach camping between Loreto and Tripui. After leaving the Loreto area, MX 1 begins a long climb over the beautiful Sierra de la Giganta Mountains before descending back to the Pacific side of the peninsula.

Puerto San Carlos is a several hour drive from Loreto and is located on the northern portion of Magdalena Bay. PSC is a quaint town and a lot of fun to explore. Almost everything is within walking distance. Only a handful of 'gringos' reside there. Commercial fishing, power generation and whale watching excursions keep the economy running. A fish processing plant, surrounded by boats, can be seen at the south entrance to the natural harbor. Hours can be spent beach combing on hard-packed sand looking for unique shells and driftwood. The Mar Y Arena Hotel (<https://www.villasmaryarena.com/>) is a great place to land and offers a few beach front parking places for rigs. The meals are so good and inexpensive that you will do little cooking. A margarita and their signature shrimp and octopus cocktail is a perfect appetizer. WiFi is available throughout the property. This is a place where the days drift by easily.

Less than two hours north of San Carlos and Ciudad Constitucion are towns like Lopez Mateos and Valle Santo Domingo that lead to more whale watching and beach camping. If you are feeling a little adventurous, the NE road outside of La Purisima will take you back to Loreto through some beautiful mountain country.

Puerto Cancun is a remote fish camp located on the south end of Magdalena Bay between Constitucion and La Paz. It is the road less traveled (by gringos) but well worth the experience. There is an unpretentious restaurant on the corner that makes deliciosa empanadas - and the truck drivers of MX 1 will agree. The rough 25-mile dirt access road takes about 2 hours to cover. Keep in mind this is a working camp. The tents and shacks are only meant to provide a place of rest for the hard-working fisherman scratching out a living. The best beach camping is on the north end of the camp. Puerto Cancun is simple and pure and rich with treasures from the sea. The experience is worth the drive.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

Gretchen and I get a lot of pleasure out of sharing Baja with friends. The joy of experiencing a jaw-dropping moment through someone else's eyes is as good as being there the first time ourselves. Each of the places described in this article have filled us with fond memories. Some are visual, like a defused morning sunrise in Bahia de Los Angeles, while others are remembered simply by sound... a whale fin smacking the water or a kayak paddle quietly dipping into a perfectly flat bay. Baja always stirs in us the joy of a simpler life. We have all we need in our camper.

When traveling in Baja, remember that you are a guest in a foreign country. Some expectations are best left checked at the border. Be courteous and wise and be prepared. On your first visit, travel with a friend. Find that special beach. Don't drive at night and boondock well off the road. Learn about where you plan to go. Meet the people and embrace their culture. Learn a few new Spanish phrases. Try new foods and sample the tequila. Let Baja dictate your pace. Only then can your journey become the destination.

Last year, we sold our beloved Toyota Tacoma and Four-Wheel Camper and used a Covid summer to build out a new rig. The result was a Dodge 3500 and a FWC Flatbed Hawk. During the last six months, we have already logged 20K miles. Now, we cannot wait to point it south towards Baja and reconnect with places and friends that always bring us peace. For us, Baja is like a homecoming... on four wheels. **X4**

Editor Note: In March 2023, shortly after this article was written, Turtleback Trailers announced they will be suspending production.



GARY AND GRETCHEN MATOS ——— AUTHOR BIO

After many years in fast-paced industries, Gary and Gretchen Matos stepped out of work and into the outdoors. The couple enjoy hiking, kayaking, dual sport motorcycling, and exploring the backroads. During the winter months they like to cross country ski or read a good book by the woodstove. Although they have traveled extensively abroad, their passion for Baja California - the people, geology, and history - have kept them coming back for over two decades. They have owned several Jeeps and pop-up campers and have taken over 30 trips to Baja.

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THE ARCTIC TRUCKS EXPERIENCE

Driving Across Iceland's Frozen Highlands

WORDS & PHOTOS – MICHAEL RUDD

STEFAN NEGOTIATES AND CROSSES A SMALL CREEK IN OUR HILUX

We were in the middle of nowhere, between the harsh volcanic desert of Kjölur and the rugged peaks of Kerlingarfjöll, when the weather turned from bad to worse. It was impossible to see the track, so we relied on our GPS to get us to our destination. Luckily, we were driving a modified Toyota Hilux AT38, a truck engineered by Arctic Trucks for traveling through the most hostile terrain on the planet. We aired down to three PSI and motored through the fierce, unforgiving blizzard to Hveravellir Nature Reserve. Our goal was to drive atop the mighty Langjökull, the second largest glacier in Iceland.

A day earlier, my wife Breck and I approached the runway at Keflavík International Airport and realized that we weren't in Kansas anymore. Iceland is one of the most remote, volcanically active, and sparsely populated countries on the planet. It rests on the edge of the Arctic Circle and has an incredibly diverse topography that includes mountains, lava fields, glaciers, farmlands, fjords, lakes, and rivers. We were greeted by Herjolfur Gudbjartsson, managing director of Arctic Trucks Reykjavik, and driven to the company's headquarters, where we were briefed on the itinerary for our adventure into the remote and mostly uninhabited Highlands.

Arctic Trucks is an international company founded in Iceland in 1997 that specializes in the re-engineering and conversions of modern four-wheel-drive vehicles for extreme conditions. For over two decades the company has offered a wide range of modified 4x4s, including Toyota, Ford, Nissan, Mercedes, Jeep, VW and Mitsubishi, all designed to deliver the ultimate mobility and handling package – on- and off-road – and for leisure, business, and exploration. The company's vehicles have been used for rescue services, mining projects, utilities and telecom providers, scientific research, and daily drivers. The company has supplied vehicles for several high-profile expeditions to polar regions including Antarctica, Greenland, and the Magnetic North Pole. For those seeking



ARCTIC TRUCKS HEADQUARTERS: REYKJAVIK, ICELAND



REYKJAVIK, ICELAND



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MOTHER AND DAUGHTER TRAVELERS FROM KANSAS WE MET AT THE HOT SPRINGS IN HVERAVELLIR NATURE RESERVE



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a guided 4x4 adventure, the company offers Antarctica Expeditions and the Arctic Trucks Experience in Iceland, where you can climb behind the wheel and into the driver seat.

We left the Arctic Trucks' office in a '18 Toyota Hilux Double Cab 4x4 powered by a 2.4L turbodiesel engine. Stefan Jons-son, store manager, and Hinrik Johanns-son, research and development director, joined us in a '17 Nissan Navara Dual Cab 4x4 built for a local customer. As we navigated the paved streets and numerous roundabouts of the city, we were surprised by the excellent handling of the Hilux, considering that it rolled on Arctic Trucks-brand AT405 38x15.5R15 tires.



KERLINGARFJÖLL MOUNTAIN RESORT

Within ten minutes, we were out of the city and into the wild, harsh, and remote Icelandic countryside. Considering the terrain, it was apparent why so many folks were using an Arctic Truck for their daily drivers. We headed east on Route 36 towards Gullfoss, a massive waterfall situated in the upper part of the Hvítá River, located 119 kilometers northeast of Reykjavik. The pavement ended just past the Gullfoss Visitor Center at Kjölur Road (Route 35). It quickly became a rough, rutted, and muddy mess, so we stopped to air down. A few kilometers later, we crossed a glacial-fed river and continued driving northward to Bláfell Mountain (elevation 3,950') where we tested our rigs on its powdery slopes.



STEFAN AIRING UP WITH THE ON-BOARD COMPRESSOR

Afterwards, we motored through the drifting snow and onto the main track, which quickly disappeared into a blanket of white. Staying on course was a challenge since it was impossible to distinguish the ground from the sky and keep sight of Stefan, who led the way through the whiteout. Earlier that day he had programmed his GPS coordinates for Kerlingarfjöll Mountain Resort, a popular destination for winter sports enthusiasts. We communicated on two-way radios and hoped that the blizzard would soon let up so that we'd arrive at Kerlingarfjöll at a decent hour. To our delight, we rolled in around six p.m. just as the weather was clearing, and were greeted by the care-



THE MIGHTY GULLFOS

STEFAN GETS STUCK IN THE CREEK AND NEEDS WINCH ASSISTANCE TO PROCEED THROUGH THE DEEP POWDER





S FALLS ON THE HVITA RIVER



taker who showed us to our accommodations. Later that evening, we were treated to an amazing dinner consisting of local lamb, potatoes, and veggies grilled on the barbeque. After the feast, we became better acquainted with Stefan and Hinrik while toasting to shots of Brennivín, a popular Icelandic liquor consumed during special occasions. It was midnight when we decided to turn in, so we said good-night, put on our boots and parkas, and headed out into gale-force winds to our guest quarters next door. To our surprise, the northern lights appeared in the Arctic sky as we were walking to our room; it was the perfect ending to a long and adventurous day.

Morning came and while enjoying a hot breakfast we discussed our route and itinerary for the next two days. We agreed to head to a higher elevation with deeper snow so that we could test the limits of our Arctic Trucks, then make our way to Hveradalir, one of the most spectacular geothermal resorts in Iceland. We left Kerlingarfjöll and soon found ourselves in diff-deep powder near Setrid. We aired down to three PSI to maintain forward momentum through the snow and arrived at Setrid around noon. Iceland has many remote accommodations (aka mountain huts) for the adventure traveler, and the one at Setrid even had a cell tower with 4G. We were surprised to have cell coverage in an area that could be mistaken for a distant, frozen planet. After devouring our ham sandwiches and chocolates, we headed west and followed the southern edge of Hofsjökull glacier towards Hveradalir where we planned to stay the night. As we traveled along the unmarked route, we came to a small creek and got our Hilux stuck in the snowbank while attempting to cross it. While attempting to find the winch cable, we noticed that it was buried underneath ice and snow and required some serious digging to locate the hook. Finally, we were able to spool out the synthetic rope and attach it to the Navara, making for a quick recovery.

Soon thereafter, the weather cleared, and the sun illuminated the Highlands, allow-

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ing us to see for miles in every direction. We retraced our tracks and passed by a ten-foot-deep crevasse that could've swallowed a vehicle whole. We considered ourselves lucky that we didn't drive into it earlier that morning. The snow wasn't so deep now, so we aired up to ten PSI, a task made easy with the on-board compressor and dual valve stems.

Our crew arrived at Hveradalir in the late afternoon and was greeted by a young lady named Victoria who showed us to our rooms. Victoria was a backpacker from Belarus who had stumbled upon Hveradalir while traveling. She was offered a job and has since managed the place by herself with the help of Bella, her trusty canine companion. After checking in, we decided to take a soak in the outdoor geothermal springs. In Iceland, you do as the locals, so we put on our swimsuits, boots and parkas, grabbed two Viking beers each, and headed out into the cold for a bath. Later that evening, we all enjoyed Victoria's homemade shepherd's pie in the warmth of the cozy hut. After dinner we drank Brennivín and discussed our plans to drive atop Langjökull glacier the next day...weather permitting.

During breakfast, we reviewed the map and planned our route for the day. We said goodbye to Victoria and set off for Langjökull, the second largest ice cap in Iceland after Vatnajökull. Earlier, we had contemplated driving its entire length (fifty kilometers) from north to south but had to scrap that plan due a storm that had just arrived. Instead, it was agreed that we'd head south on the Kjölur Road (Route 35) for about twenty-five kilometers to Lake Hvítárvatn, where we hoped to find better weather. From there, we turned west and headed towards Skálpanes, the basecamp for Mountaineers of Iceland, a snowmobile and 4x4 tours company. On our way, we carefully traversed several areas of "blue ice," which is frozen glacial runoff that had flooded the track. Stefan took his time in choosing the correct line, as a wrong decision could have led to disaster if one of our vehicles broke through the ice.



HINRIK AND STEFAN BREAK THE TRAIL INTO THE INHOSPITABLE ICELANDIC HIGHLANDS





OUR GUIDES HELP RECOVER OUR TOYOTA HILUX AS WE GOT STUCK IN THE DIFF-DEEP POWDER ON LANGJÖKULL ICE CAP

We arrived at the base of the glacier, aired down, and began our slow ascent. Several times we became stuck when our Hilux broke through the glacial ice and lost traction. Stefan explained that driving on a glacier was much different than in regular snow. The key is to go very slowly and to not break through the top layer. We found that it was easier said than done, and it seemed like we spent more time winching than glacial driving. We continued crawling forward in 4-low with front and rear lockers engaged. Within an hour we were at the highest point of the glacier and rewarded with an amazing view of the Highlands below. Suddenly, a blizzard blew in from the north and we were caught in a complete whiteout. We decided it best to head down and relied on Stefan's experience and expertise to get us safely back to basecamp where we arrived three hours later.

It goes without saying that Iceland is a land of extremes, hence the nickname: The "Land of Fire and Ice." We agreed that Arctic Trucks Experience was the ultimate extreme adventure and should be on every off-roader's bucket list. From the remote, frozen Icelandic Highlands to the top of Langsjökull glacier, you can be assured that an Arctic Truck will get you there and back in one piece. **X4**



STEFAN JONSSON AND HINRIK JOHANNSSON: OUR GUIDES FOR THE ARCTIC TRUCKS EXPERIENCE.



MICHAEL RUDD ————— AUTHOR BIO

Michael Rudd is an adventure photographer and writer. His career began in 1999 as the Features Editor for Four-Wheeler Magazine and he quickly established a niche in the industry by covering off-road races (including the Baja 1000 and Malaysia Rainforest Challenge), overland expeditions, and wild adventures in some of the most remote places on earth. Michael's exploits have taken him from the heights of Khardung La, a high mountain pass in the Himalayas of northern India at 17,582' – to Ushuaia Tierra Del Fuego, the southernmost city in the world. He has driven in the most extreme conditions on the planet, including the frozen wastelands of Hekla volcano in Iceland and the treacherous ice road to Tuktoyaktuk, Northwest Territories, Canada. His work has been published in OutdoorX4, Four-Wheeler, Expedition Portal, Rovers North, Overland Journal, Truck Trends, 4x4 Asia, Hawaii and Nevada Magazines. Michael resides in Colorado and Costa Rica with his wife, Breck. They spend several months each year exploring hard-to-reach destinations throughout Central and South America with four-wheel drive vehicles.

Follow Michael's adventures from his website at WWW.RUDDFOTOS.COM or on Facebook at [@RUDDFOTOS](https://www.facebook.com/RUDDFOTOS)

XPLOR

LIGHTING

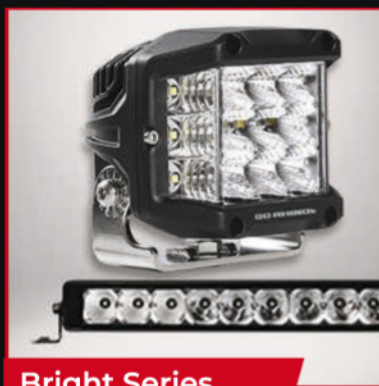


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Around the Campfire

OutdoorX4 Visits with Drew Hollenback of Tenkara Rod Company

INTERVIEW BY DANIEL THORNTON
PHOTOS – COURTESY OF TENKARA ROD COMPANY







Growing up in Japan, Drew Hollenback had become immersed in Japanese culture. Along with a love for fly fishing, he and his friend “Tuna” had determined it was important to design a rod that anyone could pick up and use to catch a fish. Thus, in 2010, Tenkara Rod Company was born.

OutdoorX4 recently had the opportunity to sit and visit with Drew to discuss his role at Tenkara and explain tenkara fly fishing.

OX4: Drew, what is your role at Tenkara Rod Co.?

DH: I am one of the founders, and since we have a niche market, we like to keep things small and nimble. So I handle a variety of different tasks – like product development, marketing, website development, and planning. But the best part of my job is how much I get to fish or “product test.”

OX4: Early on, was outdoor adventure part of your childhood? What led to your pursuit of fishing?

DH: As a kid, I was outside all the time. But the outdoors were different to me back then. There wasn't the same amount of information, infrastructure, or sense of community that there is now. When we went camping and backpacking we didn't have quality gear. I remember loading up backpacks with canned beans for dinners. Where I grew up we would get home from school, throw our backpacks down, and just go outside until it got dark. Enjoying the beauty of the outdoors now is much

easier; it is very accessible and there are so many different activities now. What led me to fishing was the information. I grew up in Japan and have had an affinity for Japanese culture my whole life. Tenkara originated in Japan and I saw people using it many years ago. Then, around 2010, I saw the style being used in the U.S. for the first time. It was so intriguing to me because of how simple it was, and also because it has that Japanese background. I feel like I'm pretty simple, so it really resonated with me. Outdoor activities these days can be so gear-heavy, but with tenkara, I can just keep it simple.

OX4: Can you describe for the readers what tenkara fishing is?

DH: Tenkara fishing is a traditional, Japanese style of fly fishing. You have a rod that collapses down to about twenty inches and extends to around twelve feet. The rods are extremely lightweight and made of carbon fiber, designed to cast light lines and light flies. You just attach a fixed length of line to the end of your rod, then a tippet and a fly. You can literally go from a collapsed rod to casting in under a minute.

OX4: What makes it different from other forms of fishing and how did it catch your attention?

DH: Traditional fly fishing or spin fishing always seemed so gear-heavy and expensive to me. The portability, packability, and simplicity of tenkara really appealed to me. I didn't need much gear and I caught fish right away. Then when I was done fishing, I could just collapse the rod and put it in a bag. One of the biggest attention grabbers to me was how I could keep a rod in my car, and upon driving over a river, creek, or lake, on a whim I could get out and fish for a few minutes and then go on my way. Fishing doesn't have to be this crazy, time-consuming activity that you base your entire lifestyle around (not that there's





anything wrong with that); it can be something you take with you everywhere you go. When you see water, you can fish. If you don't catch anything, that's fine. It's more about just getting outside.

OX4: What led you to starting Tenkara Rod Co.?

DH: As I mentioned before, when I first saw it here in the U.S., I fell in love immediately. It was an approachable way to get into fly fishing. So, after fishing it for a couple of years I really wanted to enable other people to try it. We decided to make a few prototypes and do a Kickstarter project. The project did way better than expected and we have been building it up ever since.

OX4: What products does Tenkara Rod Co. make?

DH: In terms of products, we make rods, lines, flies, nets, bags, and other fishing accessories. But we also take a lot of pride in making content. Tenkara has been in the U.S. for less than fifteen years, so along with making the products, we make a lot of videos and photos to help people wrap their heads around what tenkara is and how it can be used.

OX4: What gear is needed for someone to get started in tenkara fishing?

DH: The main things you need are a rod, tenkara-specific line, a tippet, and flies. We sell everything together as a kit for under \$200.

OX4: What should the reader be thinking about when selecting the correct rod from your selection?

DH: The main things to consider are the size of the water, the size of the fish, and the casting distance. For example, we have

a rod called the Rocky; it extends out to 14.5' and is our heaviest rod. We have caught salmon, steelhead, ocean fish, large trout, and fished it in big water. That is a very specific rod. We also have an eight-foot, extremely lightweight rod called the White Cloud. The main purpose of that rod is to fish tiny creeks, catch small fish, or teach kids to learn how to fly fish. And we make everything in between.

OX4: What has been one of your favorite products?

DH: We partnered with a small, premium rod builder in Japan to make a rod called the Yari. That was a really cool moment for us to be able to make the nicest rod possible in small batches. And it fishes like a dream.

OX4: Can you give the readers any information about a new product that you have coming out soon?

DH: 2023 is our tenth anniversary. So, we have redesigned all of our rods with upgraded materials and designs and we will start releasing these in early June! We also have a collaboration coming out with a Colorado brand – TOPO designs. It's a co-branded rod kit that also comes with a shoulder fishing bag and line wallet. It turned out really cool.

You can learn more about Tenkara Rod Company and outfit your next backcountry adventure by visiting their website at www.tenkararodco.com. **X4**

Editor Note: The Around the Campfire series is brought to you in collaboration with our friends from 67 Designs, proprietors of the finest mounting solutions for your mobile devices whether in the backcountry, around town, and at home. Learn more about 67 Designs by visiting www.67d.com.

DANIEL THORNTON

AUTHOR BIO



Daniel's ability to connect with people over a wide spectrum of backgrounds and interests has provided him unique opportunities to pursue his passions in both the financial and outdoor adventure worlds. Currently the director of operations in a wealth management firm, his true love is for traveling and exploring nature with his wife, two daughters, and many friends. Whether Daniel is camping, hiking, or off-roading in his Jeep, he finds fulfillment in shared adventures with friends both new and old. He's never met a stranger! His cherished 1973 Honda CB350 is his only solo project.

Daniel is also the founder and owner of SignOut Co., a brand created to highlight the love for outdoor adventure. Launched in 2018, SignOut was the platform which birthed the SignOut Podcast, an opportunity to hear the unique stories of individuals who are pursuing their passions in outdoor adventure. The SignOut Podcast has recently partnered with OutdoorX4 to showcase these amazing stories. Learn more by visiting www.signoutco.com.

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Visit [nps.gov](https://www.nps.gov) to find information on current park conditions and operations. Make a plan, have supplies on hand, and if you are sick, stay home.

KEEP IT CLOSE

Respect state and local ordinances regarding the open status of the site you're visiting. The NPS is working closely with both government and health authorities to gradually expand access & services through the NPS.

KEEP IT WITH YOU

Brought something in? It's your responsibility to take it out. Trash pickup and restrooms will continue to be limited through many NPS sites; as always, follow the "leave no trace" rule.

KNOW YOUR LIMITS

Save that difficult hike or new outdoor activity for a future date, in the event of injury or accident. This will help first responders, parks and communities continue to focus on pandemic response.

KEEP YOUR DISTANCE

When venturing outdoors, keep recreation to members of your household. Provide others with plenty of room in accordance with CDC social distancing guidelines of six feet, and cover your nose and mouth if safe social distancing is not possible.



RECREATE RESPONSIBLY

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE



During a float trip in Utah's Labyrinth Canyon, Eileen was tasked with supplying the cocktails for our five-day sojourn down the Green River.

She intentionally chose cocktails with redundant ingredients. This crossover allowed her to craft four very different drinks with only two spirits: white rum and tequila/mezcal.

Other ingredients necessary to make these drinks in the wild included two small cans of pineapple juice, two cans of ginger beer, fresh mint, candied ginger, orange liquor, a bag of limes, a small bottle of bitters, and a premade simple syrup. Beachbum Berry's Latitude 29 Mai Tai mix enabled Eileen to fashion delicious Mai Tais in the Utah backcountry, far from the thatched roof of any tiki bar.

Essential gear included a [cocktail shaker](#), [cocktail jigger](#), a [hand juicer](#), a cutting board, and a paring knife. A great resource for higher-end versions of these items can be found at [Cocktail Kingdom](#), but might be better for the home bar than for off-grid adventures. Additional supplies for garnishes – like [cocktail picks](#) and little umbrellas – are not essential while camping, but definitely fun!



Utah Hauler

This is a variation on the Brooklyn Burro cocktail by Ivy Mix from her book *Spirits of Latin America*.

- 2 oz. white rum ([we used Hamilton White Stache Rum](#))
- ½ oz. fresh lime juice
- ½ oz. pineapple juice
- ¼ oz. simple syrup
- 2 dashes of aromatic bitters
- 1¼ oz. of ginger beer

Shake the first five ingredients together with ice. Pour contents into a double old fashioned sized cup or mug and top with 1 ¼ ounces of ginger beer (or more if you like). Garnish with a lime wheel and candied ginger pierced with a cocktail pick.

Margarita

- 1 ½ oz tequila or mezcal (we used [Del Maguey Vida Mezcal](#))
- ¾ oz cointreau or orange liquor
(we used [Hamilton Petit Shrub Orange Liqueur](#))
- ¾ oz fresh lime juice
- ¼ oz simple syrup

Shake with ice and strain into a glass or camping mug with fresh ice. Garnish with a lime wheel.

Daiquiri

- 2 oz White Rum ([we used Hamilton White Stache Rum](#))
- ¾ oz fresh lime juice
- ½ oz simple syrup

Shake with ice and strain into a glass or cup with no ice. Serve up. No garnish.

Wiki Wiki Mai Tai

By Jeff "Beachbum" Berry

- ¾ oz Latitude 29 Mai Tai Mix
- 1 oz. fresh lime juice
- 2 oz. white Puerto Rican rum or other dry white rum

Shake with ice. Strain into a Mai Tai glass or camping mug. Garnish with fresh mint.

More recipes and history here:

[Beachbum Berry — Latitude 29 Wiki Wiki Mai Tai Mix](#)

Buy the syrup here: [Orgeat Works](#)

Simple syrup

Combine 1 cup of white sugar and 1 cup of filtered water in a container with a lid. Shake until sugar is dissolved. Store in cooler until needed.

KRIS WILSON

AUTHOR BIO



Kris Wilson lives in the Catskill Mountains of New York with her daughter, Katie. For the last two decades, she has found great fulfillment teaching high school English to juniors and seniors. In 2021, her essay, "Green Hair and Bones in Their Noses": Teenagers' Appreciation for No Country for Old Men, was published by the Modern Language Association in a collection entitled Approaches to Teaching the Works of Cormac McCarthy. Kris also likes to write for Toyota Trails and has two Land Cruisers. She loves her 2007 UZJ100, which she tows with and drives cross-country. However, the 1992 FJ80 she bought in 2021 has captured her heart.

She prefers to be outside, and loves to garden, kayak, horseback ride, back-country camp, and take walks with her German Shepherd, Lucy. Kris makes annual trips to Colorado and Utah, and is happiest at the oars of her raft on multi-day trips down wilderness rivers.



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IKAMPER DISCO SERIES

Over one hundred years ago, a South African farm worker decided to take an old plow disc, fill in the hole, add handles, and create a pan for cooking over an open fire. It is not flat like a typical pan, and not as deep as a wok. This type of pan is often called a plow disc cooker, discada, disco, skottle, or cowboy wok. In recent years, this cooking method has become more common, with many companies creating their own versions of the disco.

I had been shopping for one for a while, and after my research, ended up with the iKamper Disco Series. Unlike offerings from other companies, the Disco Series is a complete cooking system. As iKamper states on their website, "This unique modular kitchen system is so much more than your average camp stove." The disc, custom-designed for the system, accompanies a tripod, burner, and prep table. The disc can be set on top of the burner or hung from the included chains to place it directly above a campfire. Also included are cases or bags for each item.

The disc is enamel-coated cast iron, making it a naturally seasoned and non-stick surface. The bottom of the disc casting is designed to work with the included stove and tripod for an easy-to-use cooking surface. When cooking, the disc surface has multiple heat zones: The center is the hottest while the disc's edges remain cooler. This works great for cooking in stages; the cooked bacon stays warm while you make the rest of your breakfast.

If you want to cook over an open fire, you can adjust the heat of the disc by raising or lowering it with the included chain system, whether you are cooking, heating water for coffee, or making evening desserts.

On this trip, we decided on a breakfast of bacon, eggs, and hash browns. We cooked the bacon first, moved it to the edge to simmer, then cooked the hash browns and moved them to the edge to stay crispy and hot, and finally dropped the eggs in for a quick cook in the hot center. That evening, we enjoyed chicken fajitas for dinner (see on next page).

LIKES

The system is well built. Included is a very sturdy tripod, with attachment points for hanging the gas canister and locking the chain when hanging the disc. The carrying cases are a nice touch. The disc handles can be removed for easy storage and don't get too hot to use after cooking. As a bonus, the burner can be used on a table top with regular camp pots and pans if needed. It is easy to set up and break down.

DISLIKES

The disc size limits the size of meals, and would best serve two-to-four people, depending on what you are cooking. Also, we would have liked one carry bag for everything to keep it better organized.

Overall, this is a great system. The disc is large enough to suit many campers and the adjustable tripod sets it at the right height for every chef. This has proven a great addition to our camp kitchen.





RECIPE

Easy Basecamp Chicken Fajitas (serves 2-4)

- 1-1.25 lbs of chicken breast
- 1 bell pepper
(or 1/3 of each red, yellow, and orange bell peppers)
- 1/2 yellow onion
- 1 tbsp. olive oil or butter
(we carry a small container of olive oil) - for cooking
- 2 tbsp. olive oil - for marinade
- 1 packet of fajita seasoning or marinade
(I used McCormick's Fajita seasoning)
- 3 - 4 slices of pepper jack cheese
- Fajita-size tortillas

Before leaving for your camping trip, cut chicken breast into 2-3" strips. Place in a resealable freezer bag. Add 2 tbsp. olive oil and seasoning to the bag, then knead the chicken to ensure seasoning is evenly distributed. Keep cold until use. Slice bell pepper and onion into thin strips and place in resealable freezer bags. Note: If cooking this meal more than twenty-four hours after preparing the chicken, freezing the marinated chicken is an option.

Cooking: Heat disc on medium heat. The disc center will be much hotter than the edges. Add 1 tbsp. oil or butter, and then add bell peppers. Sauté to your liking, then move to the edge. Add onion, sauté, and move to the edge. Then, add seasoned chicken by transferring the bag's contents to the disc. Let cook, occasionally stirring and flipping the chicken. Be careful not to knock the veggies off the disc. Once the chicken is cooked through, mix bell peppers and onion with the chicken. Move this mixture to one half of the disc and throw a tortilla or two on the disc to heat. Once tortillas are warm, serve. Add pepper jack cheese and any other toppings (I like to keep it simple and only add cheese). **X4**

Note: For more tricks, tips, and recipes for camp cooking, whether you are on your bike or camping out of a vehicle, attend our class at the Overland Expo West. Look for Bob Theobald and Travis Haynie.



“Adventure is Worthwhile”
ARISTOTLE



Elephant crossing in the Namib
- by Michael Deeter





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Photo credit: adventure driven Seth Jacobsen