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# RENDEZVOUS ROUNDUP · 2018

Boat owners have at least 30 reasons to get excited about the season

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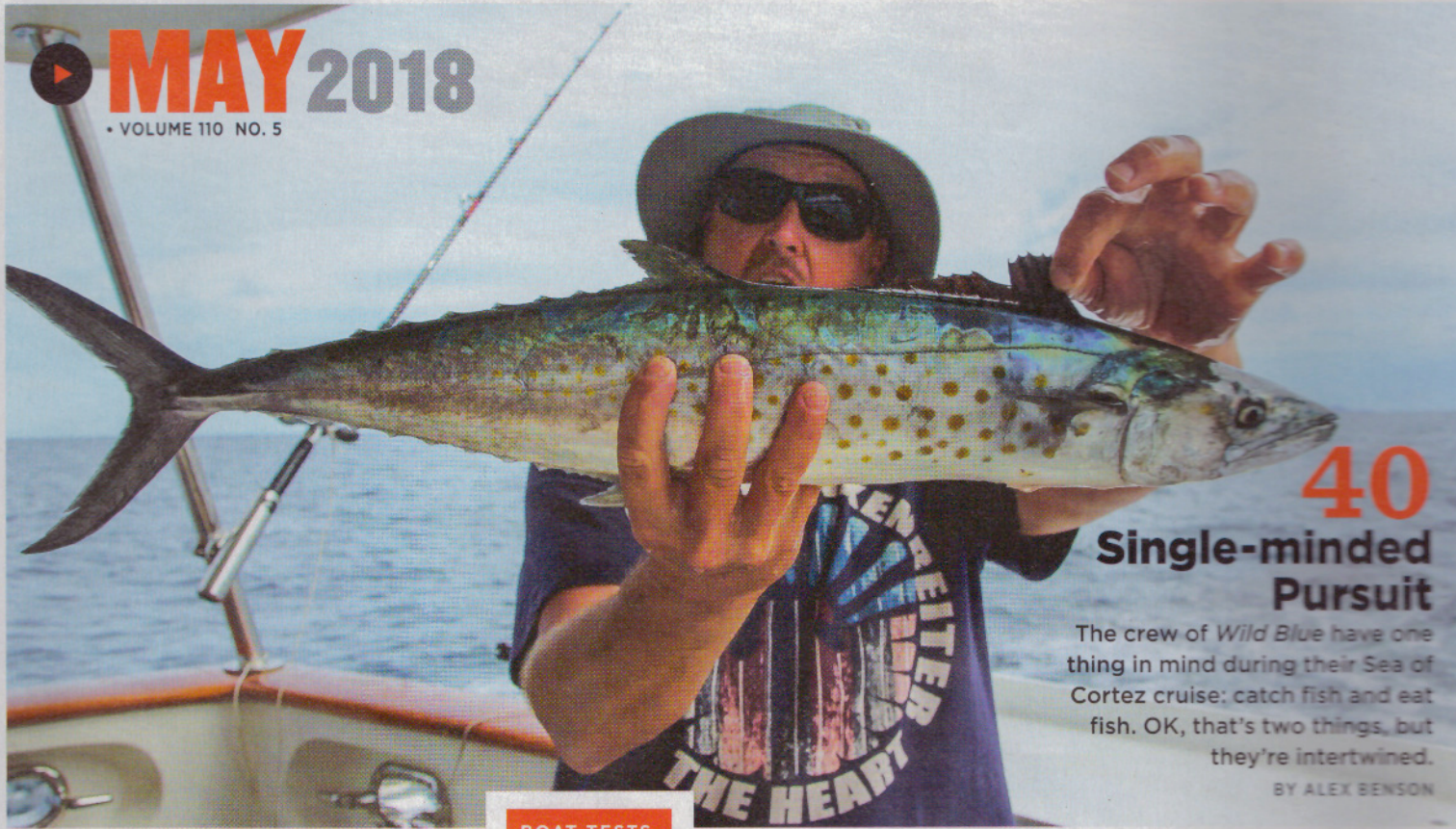
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# MAY 2018

• VOLUME 110 NO. 5



# 40

## Single-minded Pursuit

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BY ALEX BENSON

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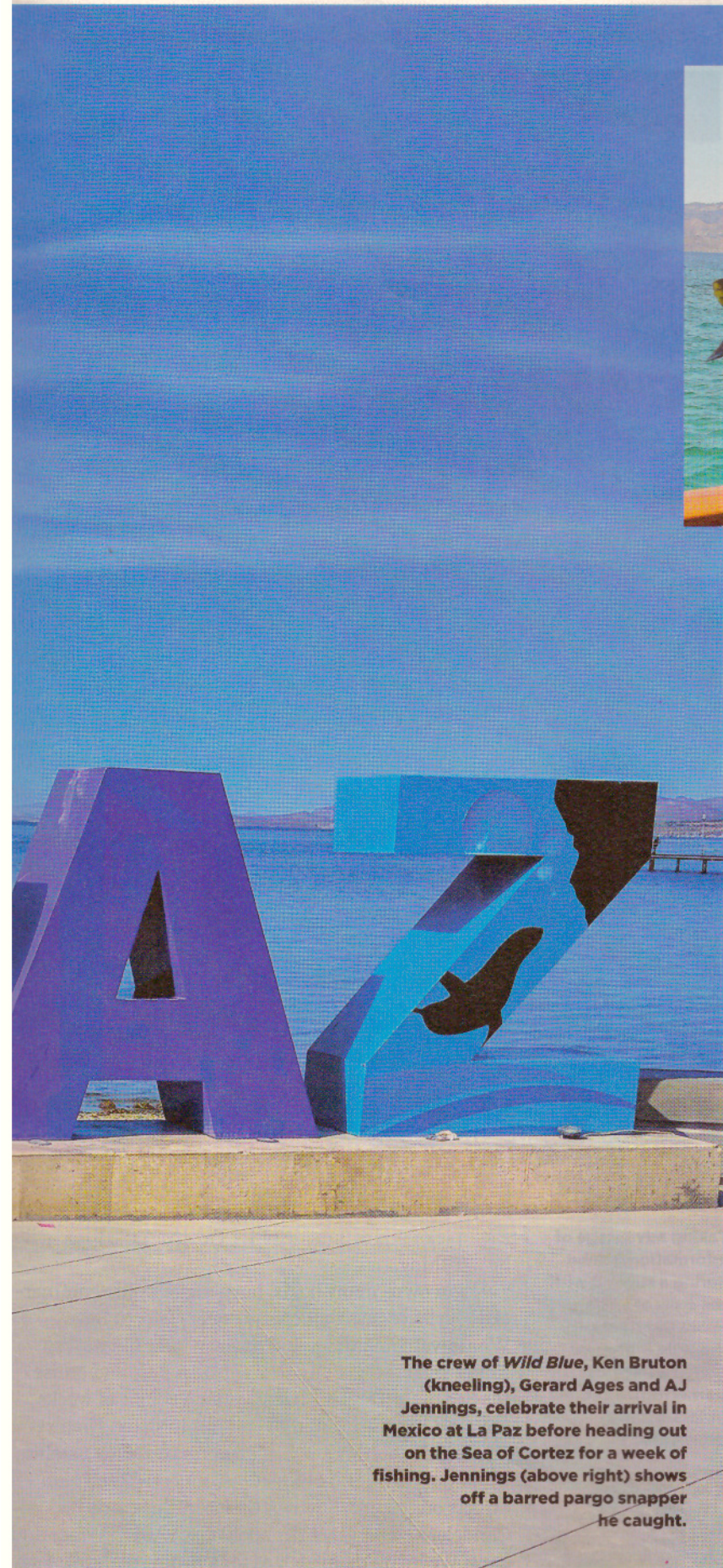


# SINGLE-MINDED PURSUIT

The crew of *Wild Blue* have one thing in mind during their Sea of Cortez cruise: catch fish and eat fish. OK, that's two things, but they're definitely related.

FROM THE BLOG OF ALEX BENSON





The crew of *Wild Blue*, Ken Bruton (kneeling), Gerard Ages and AJ Jennings, celebrate their arrival in Mexico at La Paz before heading out on the Sea of Cortez for a week of fishing. Jennings (above right) shows off a barred pargo snapper he caught.



→ We first met Alex Benson and his Selene 53, *Wild Blue*, in the March 2017 issue of *Sea*, when we published excerpts from his blog that chronicled his fishing adventure with a few of his old college buddies and his time with folks he calls the Ocean People. In the 2017 story, Benson and his pals fished for salmon in the Sitka, Alaska, area.

In this follow-up story, we find him and his crew of three, Gerard Ages, Ken Bruton, AJ Jennings, fishing the Sea of Cortez — for anything that will bite. →





## Saturday, February 3, 2018:

### LAX to La Paz

One a.m. Saturday morning. A three-hour ride to LAX from the San Luis Obispo area. Ken Bruton is driving his big diesel truck while Gerard Ages, AJ Jennings and Capt. Alex Benson are along for the ride. Ken and Gerard have crewed on *Wild Blue* before, and they added AJ. This crew is along only to catch fish and eat fish.

By 6:30 a.m., we have checked wetsuits, rods, spear guns, masks, snorkels, reels, and lures and are boarding an Alaska Air jet to Los Cabos Airport. This early flight is one of the first flights of the day into Cabo, which means the Customs crowd in Mexico should be small.

Our Uber driver — another Alex — meets us at the curb just after 11 a.m. local time and we settle in for the more than two-hour ride to La Paz. In the old days, before Los Cabos Airport and the Cabo San Lucas explosion, La Paz was the tourist destination and many airlines serviced LAP with direct flights from the States. Now the best way to get there is by walking across the border from San Diego CBX to Tijuana Airport. It's inexpensive, nonstop and fast, but still about a six-hour drive from the Central California Coast.

Alex the Uber driver speaks English and Spanish fluently, besides holding a degree in marine biology. So while he works on his master's degree, he drives for a living and talks fish along the way. The crew mines Alex for the latest fishing techniques and information. The fish talk is stimulating and this crew won't nap, even after having been awake for the past 11 hours!

Once at the boat, we drop off the gear and Alex drops us at the dive shop in downtown La Paz. We say goodbye; he says good luck.

## Sunday, February 4, 2018:

### La Paz to Isla Espiritu, Fish Trolling, Isla San Francisco

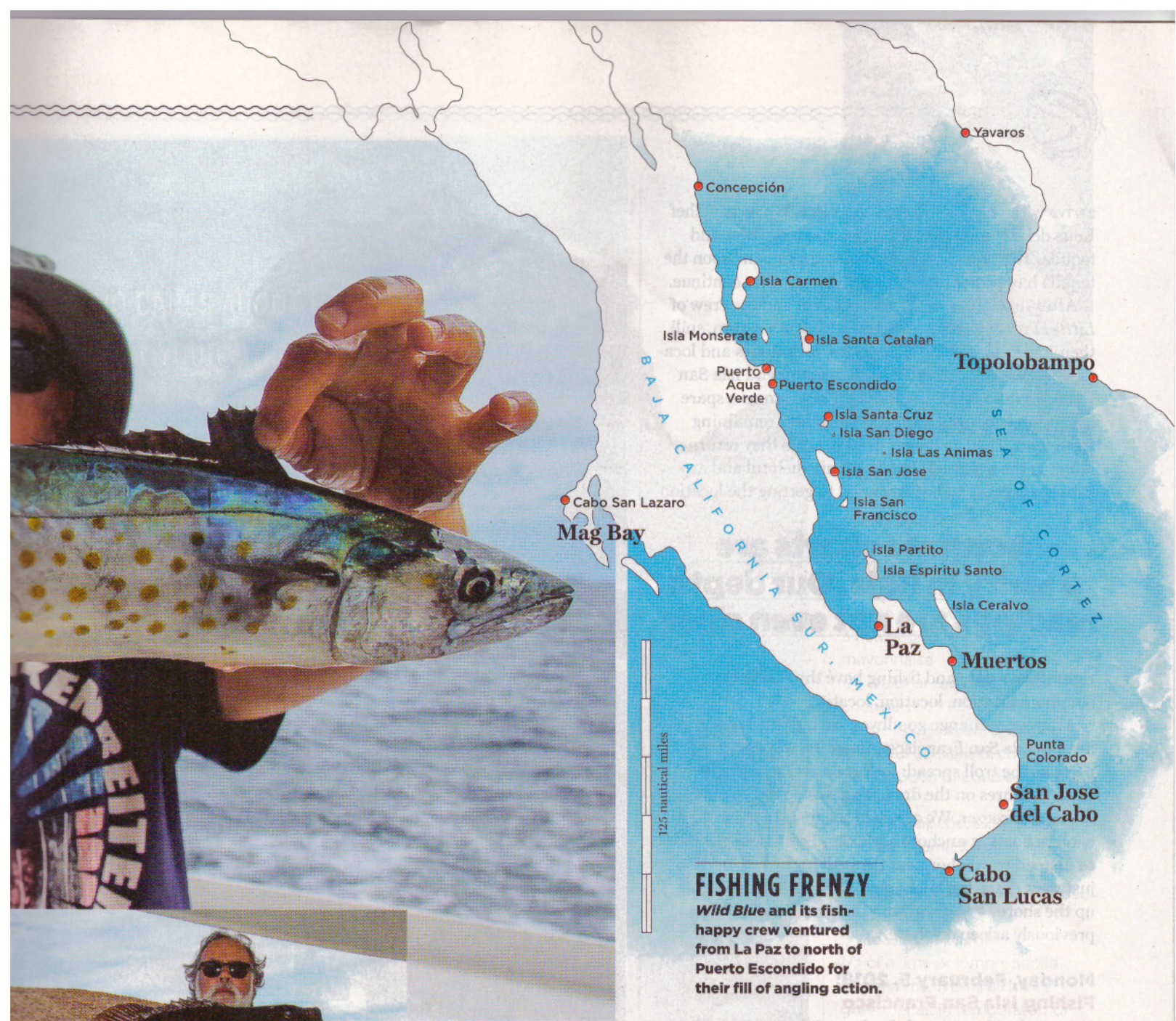
Gerard is a highly social creature. In fact, social media exists for people just like him. Like most, he uses the new technology to communicate with friends, family, clients and business associates. However, Gerard's social media use flourishes when the topic is fishing. Well before he boarded the plane to Baja, Gerard had texted, emailed and called his numerous fishing friends to find out who had recently fished Baja. Like a gemologist, he mined their minds for locations, techniques, lures, bait, rods and reels. As word spread that Gerard was coming to Baja, it was no surprise to the rest of us that he had already arranged a rendezvous with Kevin on the sailing vessel *Little Haste*, an



**Taking advantage of information gained during a summit with the crew of *Little Haste* (far right), the *Wild Blue* crew scored a Pacific sierra (top), a cabrilla (middle) and a triggerfish.**

Asian-designed ketch. The meet will be at Isla Espiritu a couple of hours outside of La Paz. And the topic will be ... fishing.

Kevin owns many boats, but a majority are commercial tourist vessels that operate out of Morro Bay. Whale watching slows during the winter months, so Kevin and crew get on *Little Haste* in Baja and cruise the Sea of Cortez. He's been out for a couple of weeks now and has fishing and diving tips to share. He texts Gerard his coordinates via Garmin's In-Reach Satellite Communicator, and our media-connected crewman directs our course. Soon we arrive in Ensenada del Candelero Bay and set the hook next to *Little Haste* and crew. We invite them aboard for a fishing summit. The



Yavaros  
 Concepción  
 Isla Carmen  
 Isla Monserate  
 Isla Santa Catalan  
 Puerto Aqua Verde  
 Puerto Escondido  
 Isla Santa Cruz  
 Isla San Diego  
 Isla Las Animas  
 Isla San Jose  
 Isla San Francisco  
 Isla Partito  
 Isla Espiritu Santo  
 Isla Ceralvo  
 La Paz  
 Muertos  
 Punta Colorado  
 San Jose del Cabo  
 Cabo San Lucas

Baja California Sur, Mexico  
 Topolobampo  
 Mag Bay

125 nautical miles

**FISHING FRENZY**  
*Wild Blue* and its fish-happy crew ventured from La Paz to north of Puerto Escondido for their fill of angling action.





arrive with beer, tequila and chocolate. We supply Chef Ken's delicious guacamole, chips, and more beer and tequila. The shot glasses and limes appear, and soon the tequila has evaporated, but the fishing stories continue.

After much beer and tequila, Kevin and the crew of *Little Haste*, like a spy injected with truth serum, spill their guts and divulge fishing tips, techniques and locations on the Sea of Cortez. They recommend Isla San Francisco and Isla Las Animas. They loan us a spare spear gun rubber band and give us their remaining fresh food. They no longer need it, since they return home in the morning. They are quite helpful and any fishing success can be attributed to getting the location

## **Accurate charts are a rarity in Baja. Our depth readings are not even close.**

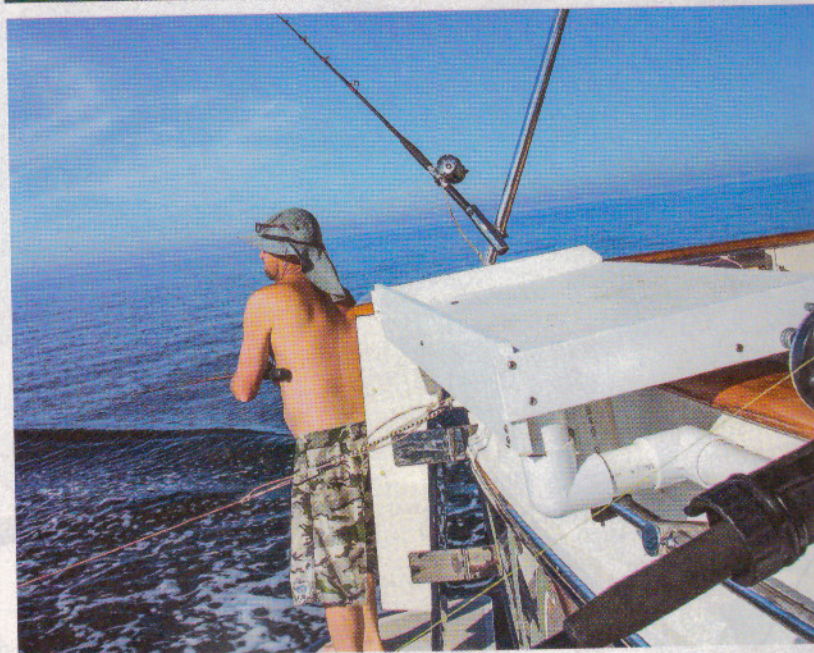
right. Real estate and fishing have three aspects in common: location, location, location!

After we exchange goodbyes, we pull the hook and head to Isla San Francisco. Along the way the crew perfects the troll spread: four rods and an extra line. With five lures on the drag, it's a wonder we're not filling the freezer. We arrive in the dark to more than enough boats at anchor in Isla San Francisco's big bay, so instead we anchor near the wall in the indentation just west of the big anchorage. Our LED floods light up the shore — and wake up the panguero fishermen previously asleep on shore.

### **Monday, February 5, 2018: Fishing Isla San Francisco**

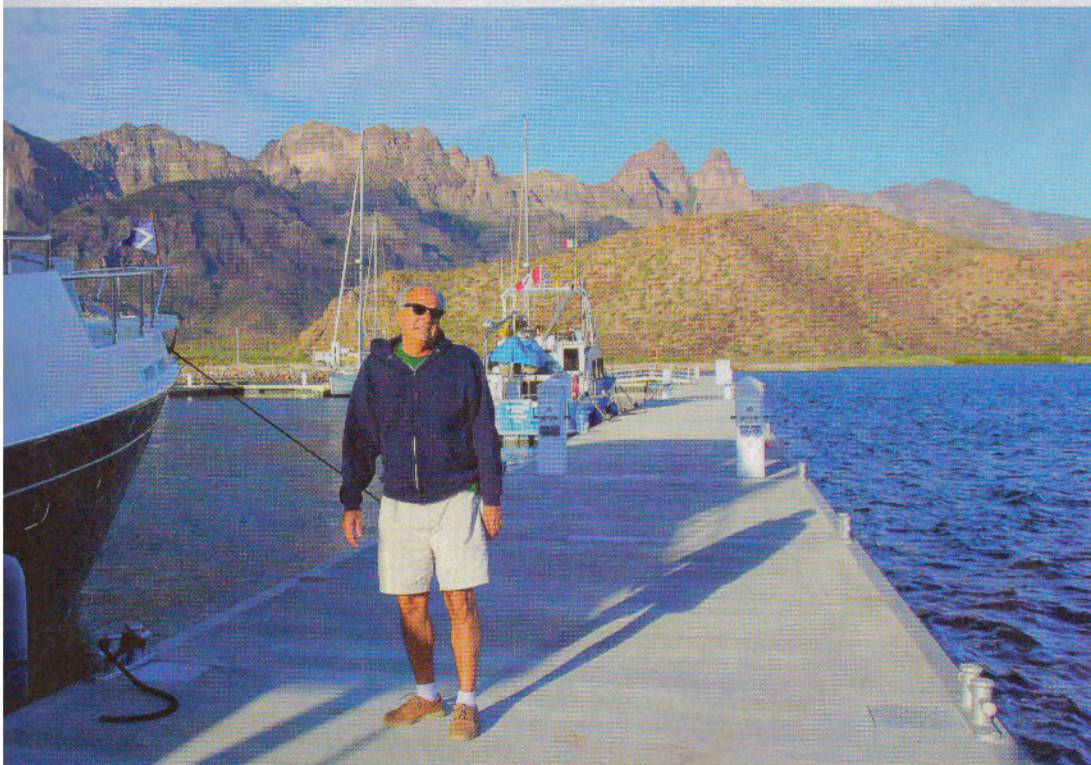
We decide to spend the day at Isla San Francisco. Gerard and AJ snorkel the wall and connect with a few small fish. Ken and Alex troll Isla SF's east side, with Rapalás, close to shore. Soon a good-sized *cabrilla* eats it up and Ken lands a tasty fish, aka "chocolate," as another gringo watches from a passing dinghy. He calls over his congratulations. Shortly thereafter he lifts a rather *large* *cabrilla*, just to help keep our ego in check.

In our experience, and that of many others, accurate charts are a rarity in Baja. Our C-Map and Navionics electronic charts look good, but their depth readings are not even close. Worse, some land masses are up to a mile away from where the electronic chart shows them. Typically the Baja peninsula land mass is close to actual position, but the reefs and islands are not close. Some well-traveled islands, such as Espiritu and San Francisco, are near accurate, but Las Animas is close



(Clockwise from top left) Gerard prepares to snorkel at Bahía Aqua Verde. *Little Haste* sits at anchor off Isla Espiritu. Alex stops for a picture beside *Wild Blue* in Puerto Escondido. AJ reels in a fish.

to a mile off both C-Map and Navionics charts. In Navionics has us passing directly through the cen Animas! C-Map has us anchored 500 yards on shore at Punta Colorado on Carmen Island. The best Ba chart solution we've found is "Sea of Cortez: A Cru Guidebook." These charts have proved to be accurate. Electronic versions of these charts are available for use with various apps. The book lists the waypoints for anchoring, waypoints for safe passages and waypoints for caution, such as reefs to avoid.



**Tuesday, February 6, 2018:**  
**From San Francisco to Isla Las Animas to San Marte**

We decide to get an early start and fish Kevin's recommended Isla Las Animas off the east side of Isla San Jose. We leave at 4 a.m. with the expectation of arriving around 6:30 a.m., a prime fishing time of day at Las Animas. As is typical in the Sea of Cortez, the boat's electronic

C-Map and Navionics charts show Isla Las Animas' location about 0.8 nautical miles farther west than reality. In fact the chart has us cruising directly across the island. Luckily it is well lit, even if the charted light location does not jibe with reality, something that wouldn't be tolerated for long in the U.S.

We circle Isla Las Animas a couple of  
*continued on page 58*



**Dynamic Dip**

Chef Ken Bruton has a great guacamole recipe that he's willing to share. Benson says there is no better guac recipe.

- 3 large ripe avocados
- 3 heaping tablespoons of mayonnaise
- 1/2 white or red onion, finely chopped
- 1 large ripe tomato, chopped
- 1 handful of cilantro, chopped
- 1 tablespoon of Louisiana hot sauce
- 1/8 of a jalapeño, extra finely chopped (omit if you don't like heat)
- 1 or 2 fresh garlic cloves, pressed
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon pepper
- 1/2 of a lime or lemon, juiced
- Mix and mash until all looks green; let sit in refrigerator for 30 minutes and enjoy.

**Super Side**

If you've been lucky enough to catch a fish and need a side dish, Chef Bruton's easy rice is just the thing.

- 1 cup rice
- 2 cups water
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 teaspoon curry powder
- 2 tablespoons rojo salsa
- Bring to boil, reduce heat to simmer, place lid on.
- When water has been absorbed, check consistency and serve.



continued from page 45

times while trolling the big spread, but the fishing seems to be nearer to the island, as the pangueros move their pangas close in. We follow suit and watch the pangueros' technique. Then Gerard starts conversing in Spanish. Whatever they say, we both fish the same rock off the north end of Las

watch as we cast lures into the pangueros' fishing hole; however, they must be somewhat comforted by the fact that we are not taking any fish!

Except for AJ's triggerfish, after four hours Las Animas is a bust for the gringos. It is time to move, so we opt for San Marte anchorage near three reefs, which is good

snorkeling while Ken and Alex troll the rocky shore in the tender. By late afternoon, Gerard comes back with a good-sized dogfish grouper. It turns into great dinner.

**Thursday, February 8, 2018:  
Puerto Escondido to Punta Colorado, then Bahia Agua Verde**

After a couple of AJ's breakfast burritos, we slip our dock lines and depart friendly Puerto Escondido. Our goal today is Punta Colorado anchorage on the southeast side of Isla Carmen. There's a diving reef, and we hope to troll in the tender too.

Not far from Puerto Escondido, along the north shore, we notice a kayaker on the beach. It appears he has lost his swim trunks ... no, that's maybe a nude beach?

Our route takes us above Isla Dansant and below Isla Carmen. After 90 minutes we reach the anchorage just below Punta

**It was great fun again being on the water.  
It will take some time to recover from the  
little bit of fun we had this week.**

Animas, the boats just 20 feet apart. The pangueros chum lots, causing the rock fish to leave their holes in a feeding frenzy. The fishermen then hand-line cast into the chummed water, reeling in fish after fish. Soon they back off, inviting us to try our luck. It is nice of them to stand by and

for diving and fishing. By 10:30 we are watching the spread and hoping for the sound of a "fast-clicking reel." Along our route, we pass between Isla San Diego and Isla Santa Cruz — giant rocks in the sea — and arrive in Bahia San Marte at 3:30.

Gerard and AJ suit up for reef

**boat nut / bōt nŭt / n.**

"For those who understand there is no explanation necessary....for those who do not understand, there is no explanation possible." - ZIAD K. ABDELNOUR

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Colorado on Isla Carmen's southeast side. We drop the anchor and prep for more fishing. After a couple of hours AJ has a catch. When the fishing slows, we pick up the anchor and head for Bahia Agua Verde, where we drop the anchor just after sunset.

**Friday, February 9, 2018:  
Night Cruise to Isla San Francisco**

Around 4 p.m. it is time to get going for a nighttime cruise. We have so much fun in the sun, we're finding it best to do some of our motoring during the dark hours, leaving more time to snorkel and fish during the day. By leaving late in the day, we'll be trolling with the sun low on the horizon, which is a good time for fishing. Along the way, we enjoy fresh breaded yellowtail, Ken's rice and a cool green salad. Our LEDs light up the ocean in front, but it's all good, since we will be anchoring at Isla San Francisco's west

anchorage, marked clearly on the chart from last Sunday.

**Saturday, February 10, 2018:  
Isla San Francisco (Again)**

We wake up at anchor in Isla San Francisco's west anchorage. During the night a moderate south wind with chop was blowing against us toward a lee shore, but the anchor held. It was not a sound sleep and the waves slapped noisily on the hull. Alex starts the motor and we move to the north anchorage, out of the sloppy conditions and into smooth water. Three other boats have made the same move. AJ and Ken are off in the tender while Gerard takes video of the rocky reef with his GoPro camera.

**Sunday, February 11, 2018:  
Night Cruise to La Paz  
and Carnival La Paz**

The wind switched from south to west late last evening, which made for a

short sleep. The bouncy night kept Alex on "catnap" anchor watch as the westerly winds made for a lee-shore anchorage again. It's a common occurrence, and the guidebooks recommend moving 4 miles west to Cabeza de Mehudo when the middle-of-the-night westerlies blow up. We planned on leaving at 4 a.m., but by 3 a.m. Alex has had enough. He starts the engine and wakes the crew. Most report for night duty as we raise the anchor and retrace our course around Isla SF in the darkness, eventually pointing toward La Paz. We hope to be in by 8 a.m., but the westerlies again switch south and we have wind and waves on the nose. Still, we clear the Costa Baja breakwater by 8:30, which gives us time to clean the boat and take in the last day of Carnival La Paz.

It was great fun again being on the water with three good fisherman. It will take some time to recover from the little bit of fun we had this week. 🍷

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