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# Sea

**Mini-Cruise To Angel Island  
Hitting The Trail By Boat  
Techniques To Catch A Trout**





## 7 Million Years Later, Not Much Has Changed On Guadalupe

By HUGH McISAAC

**T**he sea was like a gigantic vat of blue iodine. Not even birds broke the silence—only the ocean was teeming with life.

The island rose like some primeval being thrust from the bottom of the sea, purple and twisted into fleeting forms of shadow, while the seas hammered at its neck creating a white froth collar. No sign of human or other life could be seen and the *Pentameter* floated by like a gnat, unnoticed in the majestic silence of this tormented place.

As we approached, a few scrub cedars clung to the edge of a far away ridge like old crones stirring a witch's brew and the vaporous clouds created by the tradewind battering the craggy heights fell away from the island in a long gray line.

Seven million years ago in a series of huge volcanic eruptions the island of Guadalupe was created. Little has changed since then. In a place such as this one becomes more aware of the ancient relationship between matter and life, between being and non-being. These were first impressions from the *Pentameter* at Guadalupe Island for four urban refugees escaping from Los Angeles freeways and smog—300 miles to the north.

Our voyage began with a reading of Leland Lewis' *Sea Guide, Volume II: Baja California*. Sailing to Guadalupe does not require blue water sailing skills and celestial navigation. The fascinating recent history of the island and its geological phenomena, including a mountain rising 4500 feet and lava cliffs 2000 feet in height, made the island seem a most interesting place to visit. Also, the island is an excellent destination to test one's preparation for more distant trips.

This voyage can be completed in one week's time. The best months to sail to Guadalupe are March through May or October through November. Summer months are known for the chubasco, the intense tropical hurricane occurring on the west coast of Mexico. Most of these storms pass to the south of Guadalupe, but to experience one might be too much of a test for crew, ship and one's insurance agent, who usually specifies no coverage for travel to Guadalupe in summer months.

Sailing to San Diego the weekend before our departure saved one extra day for the trip. Also, the Mexican consulate in San Diego is familiar with handling consular

clearance procedures for small vessels entering Mexican waters. Larry Baldwin, who lives aboard his cruising ketch at Silver Gate YC on Shelter Island, has developed a packet of mimeographed forms in Spanish with instructions for their completion in English which make filing for consular clearance and completing crew lists required for clearing Mexican ports extremely simple. These forms entitled *Crew List* cost \$4; a customhouse broker charges \$35 to \$40 for preparing these forms, which more often than not are incorrect and have to be redone at the port of entry.

From San Diego we sailed to Ensenada after being delayed 12 hours by a passing storm front. Sunday morning the wind freshened to 25 knots out of the northwest as the dry front passed through, and in the face of rising winds and rising expectations we headed south by southwest from Punta Banda to Guadalupe—189 miles away.

Twenty-four hours later we were in sight of the island—only 23 miles away. The *Pentameter* made good 166 miles in that 24-hour period, averaging over 7 knots.

Guadalupe was first discovered by Sebastian Vizcaino in 1602 when one of his vessels became separated from the fleet during a severe storm. The island also is mentioned in the logs of some Manila Galleons crossing from the Philippines during the last half of the 16th century.

Guadalupe is approximately the size of Catalina Island—20 miles long and six miles wide at its widest point. The climate is mainly desert, except for the high valley on the north side of the island which receives precipitation from perpetual clouds formed by the tradewind battering the island. Early accounts described a verdant paradise, filled with flowers, and birds who would eat from the hand. All this has changed because of the proliferation of a herd of goats introduced by whalers in the 1850s and 60s. Only the mature cedar and oak groves have survived their assault. These interesting trees have evolved into species distinct from their mainland brothers, because of their separation from the continental land mass. The indigenous oak is reported to have the largest acorn in the world, nearly two full inches in diameter.

Approaching the northeast point, we found winds increasing to 40 knots because of a venturi effect around the point. Before we knew it the *Pentameter* was streaking through the ocean with the sumlog pegged at 10 knots. In

approaching the northeast anchorage in the afternoon, we recommend rounding the point well to the east and coming up to the northeast anchorage from Twin Canyons, four miles south of the point, and then proceeding in the lee of the island to the northeast anchorage.

Anchoring in 30 feet of water on the narrow shelf which plunges 200 feet from shore, we were greeted by a healthy herd of California fur seals which controlled the beach. Until 1954, the California fur seal was thought to be extinct, when a small herd was discovered six miles south of the anchorage at a point subsequently named Point Discovery in honor of the event.

Behind the anchorage rose a massive lava cliff, twisted and streaked like a huge slice of marble cake. Astride the barren valley leading to the anchorage are the remains of a Mexican fort abandoned in 1947. We anchored north of the reef and directly abeam the brackish fresh-water well and rusted boiler—all that remains of a goatmeat-canning operation abandoned years ago.

The following morning we explored the central valley, which abounds with friendly birds which have not yet learned how dangerous contact with the animal, man, might be. The seals paid little attention to our presence. They, too, had forgotten the lessons brutally taught their ancestors. The valley was splashed with orange and reds, broken only by purple lava dikes.

During the afternoon, we sailed south, convoyed by a group of 15 to 25 cavorting porpoises sporting in the afternoon sun. We also spotted a huge turtle swimming lazily in the iodine-blue sea.

By late afternoon we had passed Cinder Point and the old abandoned whaling station at Punta Proa and rounded Toro Head—an ominous 1000-foot-high formation replete with grinning teeth and looking like some primordial ape whose special prey is small boats. The wind now was blowing 20 to 25 knots at the meteorological station located at the extreme southern end of the island. We were greeted by the whole population at the station—50 persons, including wives and children.

Captain Perez and his lieutenant, Ignacio, warned us against anchoring near the station and escorted us to Melpomene Cove 1½ miles east. Melpomene Cove is a steep bight bisected by a draw and bounded on the east by the massive Toro Head. The beach of the cove is rimmed with jagged rocks and the anchorage is subject to heavy surge and strong winds. Captain Perez helped us anchor west of the draw to escape the more violent gusts of wind which rake the anchorage during the night.

We anchored 300 yards from shore in 10 fathoms using two anchors with five-to-one scope. That night we kept an anchor watch with the wind blowing from shore in gusts up to 30 knots.


The following morning, we traded a fifth of Hill and Hill (partially used) for eight delicious lobsters. The crew at the station escorted us ashore and showed us the southern section of the island. The village was nestled around a placid lagoon whose peaceful surface belied the dangerous underwater lava heads with peaks which would dismember any boat foolish enough to venture in. The homes were small and painted in variegated colors—greens, whites and yellows predominating. On the hill, the ever present chapel glistened like a white Alhambra, showing the Moorish influence of a mosque topped by a Christian cross.

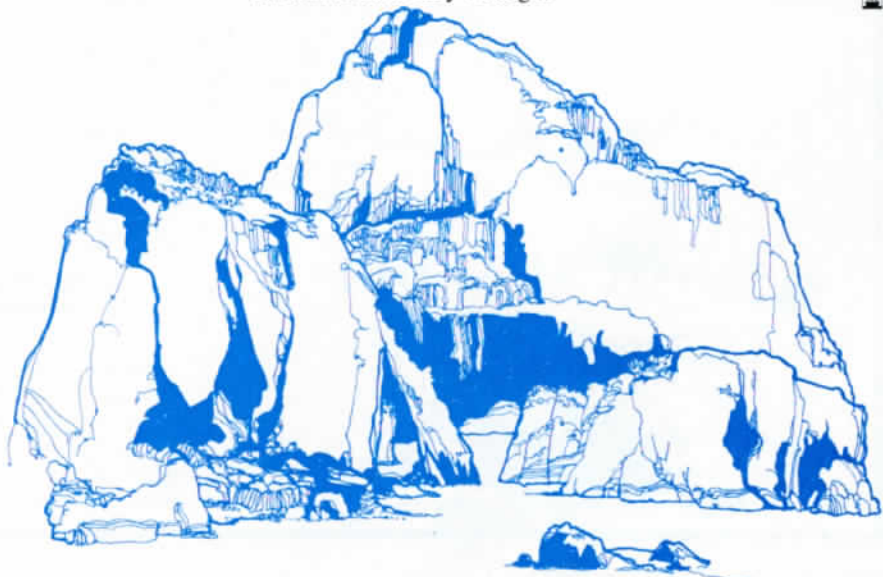
The children were everywhere—very courteous and respectful. We felt like explorers landing in some distant land among people who spoke a different language and lived different, simpler lives.

Everyone deferred to Captain Perez who commanded respect more with his silence than what he said. One sensed here is a fair man whose rule, while iron, was beneficent and kind. There was everywhere an openness and acceptance of the stranger so characteristic of humans living in isolated, out-of-the-way places who perhaps feel much closer to man than their alienated urban brothers. Whatever one senses, it is difference—a welcome difference from the pushing, shoving, cynical contacts too prevalent among “civilized” folk.

The day was capped with “The Eastern Pacific Volleyball Tournament,” featuring the tired crew of the *Pentameter* and the fresh troops from the Mexican Naval station. Exhausted and happy we returned to the *Pentameter*. As we left, we felt a sense of loss and perhaps envy of those who amused themselves by catching lobster, scrambling through rich tidepools, and fishing in the fertile Pacific.

That day we returned to the northeast anchorage, foregoing a visit to the west anchorage upon the advice of the naval commander, who emphasized his “muy malo” with short, high motions of his hand to imitate the movement of the strong northwest swell across the anchorage.

The following day, after a short jog around to the west side of the island, we pointed for San Diego—226 miles away. Forty-six hours later on May 27, we cleared Pt. Loma after the long port beat back—a great trip for four urban refugees from the freeways of Los Angeles. One week away did not seem nearly enough. 



Illustrations by Barbara Peterson