

Dear Diary:

You wouldn't believe how sweet it was. Great friggin venture into the unknown. Jolly crew. Sweet craft: Cherokee Arrow, N4989J(uliet). In the air: not a moment's anxiety, no soiled underpants. On land: incredible arid desolation (long way between voters), then surprising, lovely oases. On water: something else in Ma Nature's goodiebag for the Ozark Mtn. boy. Little warm on the ground; after all, it was August and we slept two nights and fished one day less than 200 miles from the Tropic of Cancer. Okay, some details.

WED., Aug. 29 -- Meet crew at Tucson Hilton Inn at 7:35 a.m. Pilot sitting in lobby reading L. A. Times. He'd already had breakfast (as had I) and read Tucson and Phoenix papers, the Christian Science Monitor and god knows what else (must be the Puritan ethic -- "Get up and get at 'em" -- that afflicts such unfortunates, and our Pilot is nothing if not pure). Other passenger sipping Java in Coffee Shop, chatting with constituents (woman knows no strangers!). Transfer my gear and off to 89Juliet. In the air at 8:17. In co-pilot seat beside my Congersman, M. K. Udall; his so-called wife, Tia Ella, in backseat. Clear day, smooth air. Land at Nogales, Sonora, at 8:47.

Immigration desk: passports and my visitor's permit -- Mordida. Airport Commander's office: landing fee, vague flight plan -- Mordida. Customs office: check papers on plane, much typing, many questions -- Mordida. Another Customs desk: demands luggage in from plane. Bags opened, glanced at, closed (shit, we could have imported Tommy guns with inspection like that) -- and Mordida. Getting warm on ground.

Finally in air again at 9:25. Climbed to 9,800 feet and 50 minutes later sight Golfo de California. Pilot sez he can see other side. Co-pilot sees only water. No breakers but a surf of multi-hued turquoise, delicate pastels against the rich blue of the gulf. Over water at 10:40 with Isla del Tiburon five minutes away. Over Tiburon, a barren, rugged motha, for 10 minutes. Skirting N. end of Isla Esteban four minutes later, then cross S. tip of Isla Lorenzo in five. Motor sounds okay, steady pulse. Over Baja (terra firma) just N. of Punta San Gabrael at 11:09. My calculation: 75 miles from mainland to Baja; 29 minutes flying time (Wow, that's 150+ m.p.h -- figures must be off).

Since leaving mainland had seen no ship, no plane, no birds. From Gabrael to Santa Rosalia village (31 minutes) Baja and gulf also totally uninhabited. Landed at Punta Chavata at noon for lunch. Nice place but closed for summer. Airboat ~~the~~ 21 minutes later, bound for Serenidad, resort at mouth of Mulege River. Notice Pilot turns map upsidedown to read. Comment. Do it to get "my bearings," sez he. Sweet Jesus,

a one-eyed pilot flying by an upsidedown map -- can this be for real? Reflect, observe the curious fellow. "Oh, only going South she's upsidedown?" Right, sez he. Do hope we make turnaround point.

Land on Serinidad strip 12:32. Two Bohemias, one Marguerita, lunch: refried beans, Franko-American spaghetti, rice and fresh tomatoes (from Calif?). Balanced diet for two of us; poor Tia and her "problem."

Airborne at 1:25. No foot-dragging on this trip. The narrow Mulege River valley a real oasis for two miles from gulf to village. From air palms dominate but we'll see much more from a taxi two days later. A 40-minute hop to Loreto, nearly half of it over Conception Bay at 2,500 feet. Gorgeous, placid BIG bahia, many coves and beaches -- almost totally deserted. Land on Loreto's surfaced airport at 2:05. Been gone from Tucson five hours, 45 minutes; in the air three hours, 56 minutes. Air miles: 600-plus. (Man, that would make the average speed more than 150 m.p.h. and that's tough to believe considering our ascents -- must be my Old Math).

Taxi five miles to Oasis Motel, check in, wait for Ladies to "finish" rooms -- sweep, damp mop floors, hustle here (in slow motion), bustle there. Tia, you ever seen a glass washed in a mop bucket? No ice pails. To office: get ice in bar. To bar: keep had to go to kitchen for container. Keep not friendly -- rather sell ice wrapped in homemade hooch. Water in pool's hot, 90 degrees, sez Tia. Water in Golfo's hot. But there's a breeze, so undaunted by small annoyances relax at 3:25 under thatched ramada, gazing across the blue at Isla Carmen when we can take eyes off ice bucket and co-pilot's belated Xmas present -- an elegant new Scrabble set.

Twice during two games Pilot strolled 150 yards to dunk bod in hot seawater. Must have been around 4 o'clock that co-pilot was persuaded to put a drop of disinfectant (J&B) into his icewater -- difficult decision since he looks down nose at daytime drinkers but, what the hell, Switz, you're on vacation. Sitting with loveable but vicious gamesmen under the thatch in slowly cooling air, gazing across at Carmen, he sure as hell was away from it all. Merely as a gesture of gratitude, allowed Pilot to win two games; don't know what Tia's excuse was.

Showers and a taxi to Cesar's Restaurant little after six. Took disinfectant along in small flight bag. Ate fish soup and broiled lobster. Food good enough and, between U.S. rock records on jukebox, evening came to the open veranda as gently and quiet as a cloud's shadow crossing land. More ice and a final game in Master bedroom before collapsing beneath evaporative cooler that did not improve cigarette cough during nite.

THURS. -- Some motha tapping on his foot at 7 a.m. A madman? No, only Pilot. "Time to get at it, Switz. We're going down for breakfast. No rush." (He and Tia had already taken dips in both the pool and the gulf. God, what an affliction.) No rush, my ass: five minutes later the guy's back. "The boat's ready. We better get moving." We'd ordered the friggin boat for 8 o'clock. So, dress, try to eat breakfast. Taxi to Playa de Loreto. Are rowed 50 feet to fishing boat. Motor roars, leave Baja at exactly 8 o'clock. Forty minutes later have two lines out, trolling NW corner of Carmen with lures. Many birds; beautiful birds. White shit on every pock. Pilot sez he sees flying fish. 9:02 small strike on co-pilot's rod. Pisca! Boat stops. Haul him in, a 3-pound Bonita. Handsome fellow. 28 minutes Pilot brings in Bonita more than twice as big. Showoff. In another 10 minutes Pilot fetches in a needlefish that went maybe  $3\frac{1}{2}$  pounds. Half an hour later co-pilot has big strick of day. Mammoth motha. Boat stops, reverses. Tough fight. Burns skin on L. index finger on line (don't know how). Ah, the majestic struggle! Old Man And The Sea. Finally the lure comes loose from the rock it was caught on. Ozark boy had hooked bottom of the friggin sea.

Highballing toward the NE corner of Carmen boat passes 50 feet from school of porpoise. Really out of sight -- these jolly fellows breaking water with their entire bodies in a follow-the-leader formation, then side-by-side, then solo. One dude leaped at least five feet above the surface, turned in mid-air and landed on his side with a mighty splash. Bully! Ten minutes later passed within 20, 30 feet of five seals sunning on northeast tip of Carmen. All took to the water, their barks drowning out noise of the motor. Truly Joseph Wood Crutch country, this. Along Carmen's north coast we had seen several window rocks and dozens of water-level grottos, some half as large as a tennis court. Couple of miles or so off "Seal Point" skipper stops boat, starts cutting up big Bonita and puts out a baited line. Baitboy had his line out, baited with the three-pound Bonita -- whole. Jesus, after the big mommas. El Skipper tugged, let down, tugged again, thrashing water with his line. Baitboy ditto, only less so. Then skipper hooked one, handed rod to Pilot. The tugging and reeling looked like sport, but like work also. Fish to surface, skipper holds line with one hand, clubs poor Red Snapper on noggin and brings him aboard.

Fifteen minutes later another hooked, rod handed to co-pilot. Used muscles untested lately, butt of rod in crouch a sensation not experienced every day. Pilot took next fish and skipper put out third line. Everybody (where were you, Tia?) brought in Snappers weighing 20-25 pounds. Baitboy reeled in and all that's left of 3-pound Bonita is head. Bet your ass there's something big down there.

Complained to Pilot and Tia that crew having all the fun (hooking), we doing all the work. Finally co-pilot took newly baited rod, let out line and before it reached bottom greedy Snapper gulped it. He set the hook, brought the motha to surface. That was it for him, he'd done the complete act and wanted no more work, no more crotch bruises -- after all, was on vacation, wasn't he? In a moment there were fish on all three lines. Could have filled boat, but at 12:30 asked skipper to head back. Had 10 Snappers, minimum of 200 pounds.

(As a recorder of taste and delicacy, shall only mention, not dwell upon, Tia's favorite sport that morning. Seems our Pilot was given a handsome slip-over shirt with bone buttons at a U.S.-Mex. conference 4, 5 weeks earlier. Had it on boat and Tia was in and out of it 2, 3 times during trip. Pilot and Ozark kid wearing long-sleeve U.S. shirts which they dunked in gulf couple of times and put back on wet to get glorious cooling. There was some dispute about the number of times (46?, 49?) that sporting woman wadded up the lovely gift shirt and shoved it toward Pilot: "Morris, wet this one for me." Even skipper and baitboy enjoyed antics of blonde Yankee sporting gal.)

At Playa beach 1:50. Took 30 (thirty) minutes to get four of the Snappers to taxi. Planned to give three to motel man on promise of fine fish meal. Co-pilot wanted to give one to taxi driver who may have had more grey hair than he. Alas, El Viejito not our driver that trip and Oasis manager latched onto all the fish. Asked about supper. "Oh, no, Senor, the cook has gone home. You have him for breakfast." (Must say, pan frying Snapper not most ennobling treatment.)

After showers, back to the Scrabble board for quick game before local tour. Loreto established as peninsula's first permanent Spanish settlement by Jesuites in 1697. Took 55 years to complete "Mother of Missions" there, first of chain extending into Calif. Stone masonry structure, restored many times after earthquakes, does have majesty but is not so massive or elaborate as later Missions. And, sure enough, was undergoing refurbishing when we toured -- many statues and holy (?) objects stored in small siderooms.

SUPERmercado kicks. Can you imagine a fifth of Chevas Regal on liquor shelf? Hecho en Mexico, of course.

Back to Oasis, another shower. Yeah, warm those days. Lollered around master bedroom rapping and sipping disinfected water. It was during this interlude that co-pilot observed, "Jesus, our one-eyed Pilot has no navel." The guy leaped from bed, took mighty breath as shoulders went back and, sure enough, the offending wrinkle disappeared and if one looked before he breathed again could see where once he had been attached to Ms. Louise. Observation was mistake, for from then on every time poor guy appeared sans shirt sporting woman inquired with pseudo-astonishment, "Morris, where's your navel?"

Taxi to Cesar's Beanery at seven. Most delicious item: different young waitress. Delectable morsel, beyond doubt, but reluctantly (as non-ugly American, a bit grey at temples, also) ordered combination Mexican dinner. Absently gazing at first stars, pouring from flight bag, fantasies of ripe young Senorita run amock.

Back at motel, one of us folds. Pilot offers a Mano-a-Mano. "You tired?" Si. "Go, I read." Then, thinking ahead nicely, "Hey, wait. How about couple of glasses of your ice?"

FRI. -- That man again at 7:30. Pan fried Snapper (ugh) and beans. In air at 8:55 for 45-minute hop back to Serenidad. Co-pilot takes controls for awhile, cruising at 3,500 feet above Conception Bay. Smooth. Pilot takes over to give us aerial view of Mulege. Beautiful valley. Many palm thatched roofs in village dominated by Mission on high hill.

Check into Cabin Guaycura.  $2\frac{1}{2}$  bedrooms, 4 double beds, one twin. Could sleep 9 -- or 10, during rutting season. One bath, big livingroom with kitchen table, small bar and fireplace. Evaporative coolers again. Showers. It's hot. Taxi to Mulege for lookaround. Total restoration of Mission underway, it's nothing but stone shell. Couldn't even enter. "No permisso." Hardhat area. Disappointed. Territorial prison depressing. Eight inmates working in village on honor system, return at nite when bell tolls. Only other guests, two mental cases. In 6 X 10 foot cubicles. Tia sez one naked as jaybird. That Tia! Soft drink at SUPERmercado. Bought shirt. Nancy's Gift Shop. Tour narrow dirt streeth and back to Serenidad for lunch.

Showers again. Is hot. Scrabble on kitchen table. Three games. To beach little past three. Pebbly, very gradual incline. Water's warm. Tiny breaker, 6, 7 inches, knocks Ozark boy around as he sits in 14-inch surf, gets water on Tokyo. Shit! Gather seven seashells, sit on dead palm ~~trunk~~ until buddies ready to return for another shower.

Open bar -- pardon me -- start disinfecting water at 4 p.m. Have serious political discussion re future of my Congersman. What the omens? How chart the future? Guy wants judgments don't feel qualified to make. But this true: want the dude back there, speaking for me as Congersman, Senator, President, King. Good man. Only advise: take any gamble you feel reasonable to advance yourself but don't try to shoot the moon in a way that would embarrass and haunt you the rest of your life -- remember, you've got to live with yourself and the rest of us until you're dead.

Start Scrabble game about 6:30 (dinner hour, 7:30). At 7:10, game halfway finished: Shit, let's eat. First in diningroom. Served. Sporting woman leaves for ice bucket which

must be refilled at bar. Wait. Wait. Finally mosey over to Guaycura. Pilot checks bedroom, returns, motions to come gaze upon collapsed figure. He bids goodnight, joins folded mate. Mix no-ice nightcap, drink it on veranda. To bed at 9:20.

SAT. -- MKU reveille at 8 o'clock. Breakfast and in air by 9:25. Fifty minutes later leave Baja at 8,800 feet. Over mainland in 27 minutes and land at Nogales, Sonora, at 11:45. Made the mainland hop at 8,500 feet, just under scattered clouds. Pilot took us up and flew through a few of them to give Ozark kid "inside" view. Didn't need to bother -- dangerous, wearing last pair underpants. (Always thought nobody knew -- really knew -- amount of turbulence in clouds.) Co-pilot took controls for 30, 40 minutes. Considerable turbulence just under clouds; tough to keep the motha level, headed right and at steady altitude. Pilot said doing okay, but bouncing around woke sporting woman.

After only 16 minutes on ground in Nogales, take off on final leg. Arrive Tucson International 12:30. Stop at U.S. Customs, then park plane at Hudgins. Buy them "Thank God We're Home Safe" lunch and get dropped at my car on Hilton lot.

So much packed into  $3\frac{1}{2}$  days. Another world, for sure, and right in our own backyard the way this crew does it. Great trip. Good vibes. For a one-eyed, no-navel, upsidedown mapreader, you're good jockey, Poppa. And dear Tia. Will she get with the resolution re her "problem?" Will we ever again see Tia in Bakini -- navel and all?

Respectfully,

(RLS)

Recorder of taste and delicacy

*Have identified lovely bird N. of Carmen as*

*"Magnificent Frigatebird" aka Man-of-War Bird.*