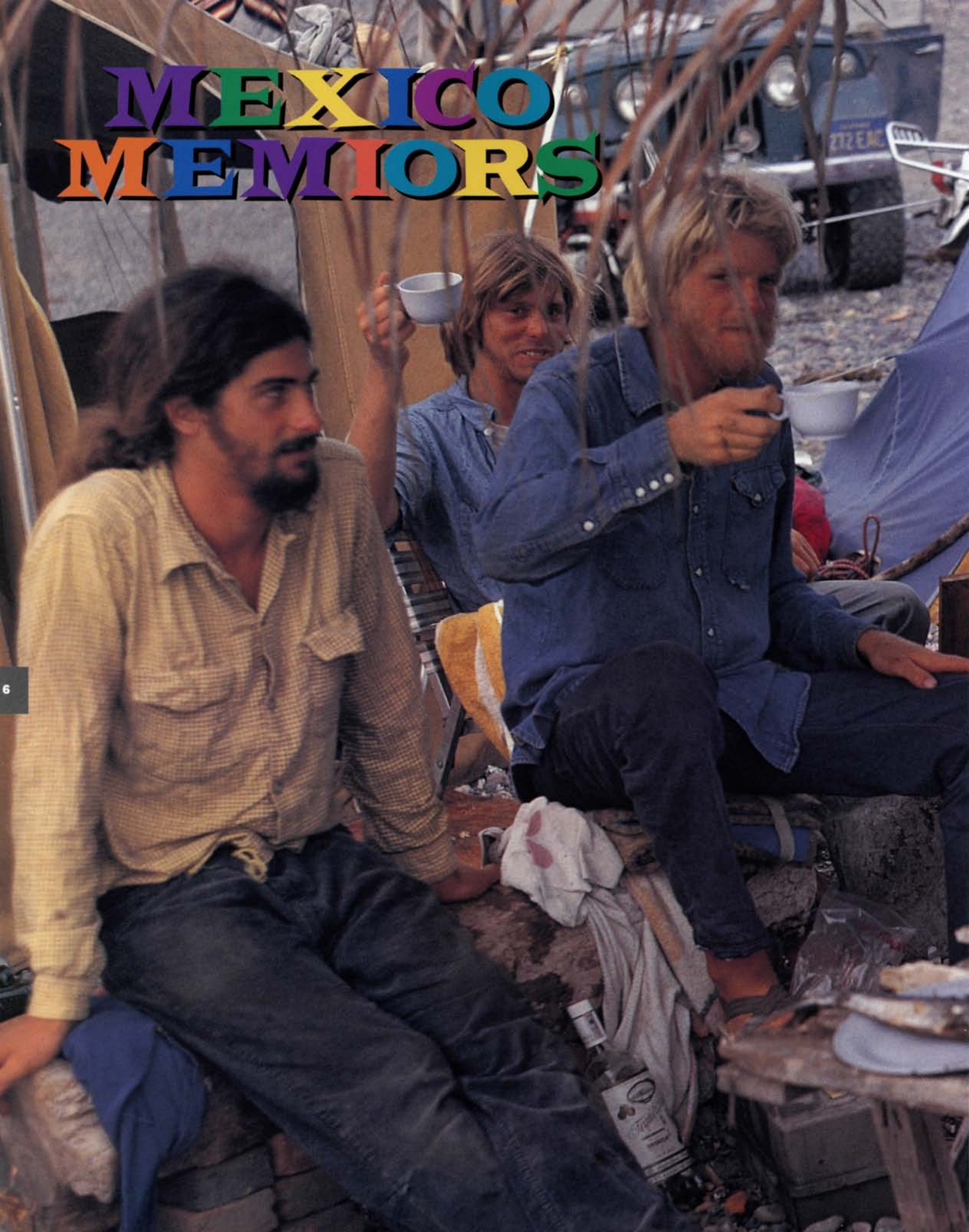


# MEXICO MEMIORS







**STORY AND PHOTOS BY TIM BERNARDY**

Christmas dinner, 1974, camped at Lazaro Cardenas. Menu: Tropical fruit salad, squash baked on the fire, fresh string beans, tomato vinegarett (courtesy of Prune—a real chef), barbecued sierra mackerel, tequila Sauza and liters of luke warm cerveza.



# 1974

Richard Nixon has just resigned as President of the United States appointing Gerald Ford as his successor. Ford immediately pardons Nixon of any wrongdoing.

Single finned swallow tails are the dominate choice in surfboards, but David Nuuhiwa can be seen daily at Huntington Beach Pier skating on a fish.

Television ratings are topped by *M\*A\*S\*H*, *Kojak* and *All in the Family*. In theaters the movie *Jaws* breaks all box office records, while *Five Summer Stories* makes its second tour and *Fluid Drive* premieres. Mohammed Ali defeats Joe Frazier. Reno Abellira and Rick Rasmussen are ranked one-two in the world of surfing. The first issue of *People Magazine* hits the stands with Mia Farrow on the cover. James Jones backside at Ala Moana is the cover of the October issue of *Surfer* magazine. Bellbottoms are still a happening and Op is just getting off the ground with its corduroy walkshort. On the radio we're hearing a lot of Jackson Browne, Bob Dylan and Jimmy Buffett. The exchange rate is 12.5 pesos to the dollar.

U.S./Mexico relations are strained and travel into Mexico is not advised. The U.S. blames its growing drug problem on Mexico. Mexico blames U.S. drug dealers for supplying arms to its guerillas. Any gringo driving a VW bus through southern Mexico is highly suspect, and fair game for the Mexican military.

My draft number, "39," is no longer the dominate force in my life. The draft has just ended. I am a senior in college, but since I no longer have to maintain my student deferment, I decide to take a break to travel and surf.

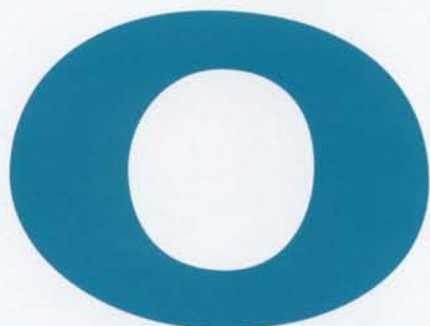




Greg Pautsch at the point, Puerto Escondido.







n October 22, 1974, Newport Beach local Lenny Foster and I piled all of our supplies into my oxidized red VW bus with a freshly rebuilt engine and headed south. This was to be the first of many excursions over the next four years. Although we had no specific destination and we didn't

speak any Spanish, we were excited to go. We planned on being gone for six months even though I had only \$600 in traveler's checks, eighty dollars cash and no credit cards. Lenny had about the same.

In the early '70s, mainland Mexico was a largely unexplored surfing wilderness that was accessible largely because it was so affordable. But it wasn't the type of easy trip that you booked through your travel agent. In fact, at the time, travel was discouraged by the U.S. State Department and the threat of banditos was real. There were no guided surf tours, and no books on where to go, just AAA maps for those with a willingness to adventure. There were not many exact destinations along the thousands of miles of coast other than a few name breaks like Cannons in Mazatlan, Matachen Bay just outside San Blas, Punta de Mita an hour or so north of Puerto Vallarta and Petacalco north of Zihuatenejo. Those who had been to the mainland gave a lot of advice about what to bring but very little about where to go. They offered only a knowing smile and encouragement, 'Just go and you will get plenty of surf.' Communication systems in Mexico were so poor that once you crossed the border you were largely out of contact with anyone at home. Letters took weeks, and phone calls home (except from large cities) were an all day affair.

The environment of a cheap, unstructured country attracted an odd assortment of draft-dodgers, drug dealers, free-thinkers, lost souls and adventurous surfers. Many were on the run from the law, life or love. In the midst of all this, we were a couple of naive kids from suburbia looking for good surf. Life on the road creates a strange bond amongst all travelers no matter how diverse their backgrounds are. Upon meeting someone we would exchange information about washed out bridges, rumors of banditos or the location of a beautiful beach. However, caution prevailed because you had no way of knowing whether the person you were talking to actually was who they said they

were. Premed student on break or escaped convict, you never knew. We learned quickly that things weren't always what they seemed and our new friends might rip us off and disappear into the night or at other times save our life.

Surfing was the hub that our Mexico experience revolved around, but it was only a part of it. Our search took us to countless remote fishing villages that rarely saw gringos much less ones with surfboards. This was my first extended interaction with the people of a third world country and they turned out to be just like people everywhere; mostly good, but not all. We were almost always greeted with such openness from the local people that we considered them somewhat naive. The saying, "Mi casa es su casa," was definitely the rule as we were frequently invited into peoples' homes to share what little they had.







**Jack Briggs, Puerto. The wind blows offshore all morning then switches onshore about 10:30. I remember Jack was the last guy in the water. I wanted to start the walk back to camp, but I didn't think leaving him out there alone was cool, so I hung out for a few more minutes and got this shot.**

The irony was that most of our negative encounters were from a couple of gringo surfers who brought their own brand of vigilante localism into Mexico. The real locals were always extremely open and friendly. The surfers that we would encounter from Brazil, France and other parts of Mexico were always friendly, but there was a strange mistrust of anyone from the States.

It has been almost twenty years since I took these photos in southern Mexico, and when I look through them, I am struck by a number of things:

What a great adventure we had! It was exciting, dangerous and in many instances uncomfortable, but all the same, one of the best times in my life. But then the passage of years has a strange way of making you forget a lot of the crummy happenings (touristas, mosquitoes, midnight dog

fight) and remember only those many, long days of perfect waves and easy drives.

We slept with scorpions, surfed with sharks, camped on the beach at the edge of a drug war zone and we never had so much fun in our lives. Death is more out in the open in Mexico than at home and viewed as a normal part of life. It seemed that a day never passed that I didn't smell something rotting in the tropical heat. Yet when we saw how quickly death can happen, we began to appreciate life more.

We were sunburned! We burnt because we had no choice, this was the zinc oxide era. We were living on the beach in the tropics, spending 6-8 hours per day in the water, and there was no waterproof sunblocks available and little talk of skin cancer. We would burn and peel and burn and peel until we bled. Sometimes hot salsa would







get into an open cut on our cracked lips and the pain would send us hopping around the campfire.

In 1974, board shorts hadn't become high-tech yet so we wore mostly cotton trunks that dried slowly in the humidity of the tropics. As a result, we lived with a constant case of "crotch rot." We'd always empathize with our buddy when we'd see him walking up the beach with his legs as far apart as possible to keep them from rubbing together.

At the time single fins were the only available choice in surfboards, so the period cutbacks in the photos seem all the more impressive.

## The Shark Attack

The boys were about to go out for an afternoon session when Lenny and I left to drive into town to Nacho's house for dinner with his family. Nacho's sister was married the day before, after a three day delay because they couldn't find the cow that they were going to butcher for the wedding fiesta. It had wandered off, but now it had been found so there was plenty of food and relatives around for another party. Lenny and I had washed our best pair of shorts and T-shirts in the river that morning for the occasion. We had just been handed strong, cold Cuba Libres when Nacho's retarded aunt came running right at me waving her arms and screaming incoherently. I froze because I had no idea what she was saying or what she would do. Nacho looked at me and said, "It's your amigo!" And ran out the front door. Lenny and I looked at each other then and followed, completely confused.

Nacho's family lived across the street from a mini Red Cross office. Two days earlier all the dogs in town had been tied to the post in front of it and vaccinated for rabies, but on that day Riley's green Jeep was parked out front and Kenny was laying in the back with towels over him. As I got closer, I could see that he was pale and staring off into space. He was in shock! I assumed that Kenny had been stung by one of the red scorpions that we had been living with. Riley was inside the Red Cross office and Mike was near Kenny's head talking to him. I asked them what happened. Kenny said that his board hit his leg as he was rolling a wave and it just exploded. Mike just stared at me

as if I was to comprehend what was happening then said, "Let's get him inside." As Lenny and I reached down under the towels to lift him by his legs, my fingers slid into the gapping holes in his legs and Kenny screamed. I flipped up the towels and saw mangled flesh that had been chewed and raked by teeth. I didn't get what Mike was communicating before, but I got it then! Kenny had been hit by a shark and didn't realize what had happened.

The injury was all below his knees, but it was deep and pervasive. We got Kenny inside the clinic and onto the table, but there they would only stitch him up well enough to make the 300 mile trek to a hospital in Acapulco. If he didn't get to a real hospital soon, he would lose both legs to gangrene.

The room was very small so we took turns being with Kenny as the doctor attempted to close his wounds. I watched as they gave him an injection of a clear liquid in his upper leg only to watch it drain out of a vein by his ankle. He was laying on his stomach, he was wearing just Speedos® and he had my hand in a "brotherhood handshake" grip. As the doctor attempted to pull a gaping wound closed with stitches, Kenny's hand clamped down on mine like a vise. I stared at his back as he crushed my hand. Every muscle was defined. As the doctor continued to tug, hundreds of tiny muscles popped to the surface of his arching back. He looked like he was being electrocuted. He let out a slobbery burst as he deflated on the bed. The wound was still being worked on, but the drugs had kicked in. My turn was up.

As I walked outside, I realized that there was a lot in front of us.

After an hour of work, Kenny sat up on the table smiling from the morphine and was just about to jump off when we shouted in unison, "No!" He was trying to convince us that we should let him go back to the camp. He promised that he wouldn't go in the water and that if we just set him up in a beach chair, he'd take pictures and just hang out. He was still in shock.

It was decided that I should drive Kenny to Acapulco because I had the most reliable car and I had been there before. We were in Lazaro Cardenas which is at the mouth of the Rio Balsa, the largest river in Mexico. The Rio Balsa also serves as the border between the state of Michoacán and Guerrero. Guerrero was the state that had the most problems with guerrillas and its mountain pot farms were famous. Acapulco is 280 miles into Guerrero and there were eight military checkpoints between Lazaro and there. No sane gringos would make this drive at night, but we had no



The shark warning we left at Lazaro.

ur book on sharks said hammerheads don't get longer than fourteen feet! We were camped at Puerto and laying around in hammocks during the afternoon watching a small boat listing badly to one side, taking its way towards the beach. So we walked down to see what the problem was. They had this monster tied up to the side—it was too big to get on board. Near shore they cut it loose, swam it to the beach and dragged it to the truck. They said it would be served in Mexico City restaurants the next day.





**Richard Casperson at Puerto. Richard was an early explorer of mainland Mexico, a mysto-man who would suddenly arrive and just as suddenly disappear. He was always on his own trip down there—not at all one of the tribal “let’s hang out together” types. He rode a bigger board and drew clean lines.**

choice. The local Red Cross was well aware of this so they gave me a one page letter that said I was an “Ambulencia.” It was getting dark as we loaded Kenny onto the bed in the back of my VW bus and Riley and I headed out.

Everything went well at first, and at the first two checkpoints they were actually sympathetic to our situation, but as the night wore on the checks became increasingly difficult. At one large checkpoint, all of the soldiers had been drinking and the head guy who was dressed like a cowboy (in Levi’s, a huge belt buckle, a flannel shirt, leather vest, cowboy boots and a black cowboy hat) decided that it was a good time to lecture me on the failings of the U.S. government. It was well after midnight, I was exhausted and I made a huge mistake, I told the head guy to “hurry up.”

The next thing I knew, we were screaming at each other on a deserted two-lane road in the middle of the blackened jungle under a sky full of stars. I could smell the rotting carcass of something off in the distance as we argued. In the chaos of the moment, I had inadvertently embarrassed him in front of his men. The argument ended with me flat on my back with a machine gun pressed to my head. I lost. I remembered the smell in the air as I obeyed whatever they asked of me.

Kenny and Riley watched from the van as I stood up brushing myself off. The commandante was clearly top dog now and calmly explained to me that he was sorry, but it was his duty to his country to check for marijuana. I politely told him that it was my duty to my friend to get him to a hospital so he didn’t lose his legs and time was

important. He continued to take his time enjoying every moment of his victory.

Riley and I didn’t know what to do. We checked Kenny and he was feeling fine (the drugs) as he lay in the back of the van, but we could see there was blood dripping from the bandages they had put on his legs at the Red Cross. Riley and I decided that there was only one way we were going to hurry this up.

As the commandante was checking for seeds under the floor mats in the front seat, Kenny suddenly let out a loud groan and began to thrash his head back and forth. That was followed by near hysteria on our part, and the commandante and friends couldn’t get us out of there quick enough. The plan had worked, and the next four or five checks were much easier. If there started to be any problem, then we just told Kenny to start groaning.

We made it to a vacant, closed-up Acapulco at 3:00 a.m. and had no idea where the hospital was. After desperately wandering in circles, we spotted some lights in an all-night diner. For the first time ever, I was happy to see a cop in Mexico. We explained the situation to him and he said to follow him. He jumped in his car, flipped on the lights and siren and took off like a shot. He never looked back. My old van was able to keep up with him for about two miles before he lost us. We were now headed in the right direction, but we weren’t sure where we were going. We could hear the siren and occasionally get a glimpse of his lights. When we finally made it to the hospital, he was waiting with a big grin and proud to have been of help.



The doctor working the graveyard shift in the emergency room was asleep on a gurney when we arrived. He looked like a tired Dustin Hoffman in need of a shave. He weighed his options; take the bandages off and face whatever is underneath, or give Kenny more pain killer and send him to the airport. Riley and I headed to a pay phone as the doctor made small talk with Kenny. We had to make the airline arrangements and call Kenny's parents.

Riley handled the call, "Mr. Ewing, Kenny is okay, but he's kinda been hit by a shark and you need to arrange for emergency medical treatment in Los Angeles. I'll call you back when I know what flight he's coming in on. He's okay though." I don't remember much of the conversation that I overheard, but (as a father now) I could only imagine the helplessness that his parents must have felt when they received that middle of the night phone call.

None of us had a credit card or enough money to buy a ticket, but the airline took care of every detail including a wheelchair transfer in Mexico City. We relayed the flight info to Kenny's parents and picked Kenny up at the hospital.

I don't really know what option the doctor took, but more drugs were definitely a part of it because Kenny was feeling great. It was almost 5:00 a.m. now, but the airport didn't open until seven and Kenny's flight was at eight. We headed toward the airport and stopped at a Denny's coffee shop on the way. The eastern horizon was just beginning to glow as we carried Kenny into the restaurant.

Walking into Denny's was bizarre. A pleasant reminder of a distant reality; an air conditioned restaurant with big booths, plastic menus, clean bathrooms and purified ice water. The people in other booths looked like our parents and grandparents on vacation. Although we bathed in the river daily, we had that "homeless" look from having lived on the beach for months. We were in incredible shape, but we were sunburned and by U.S. standards, quite scruffy. We all sat in a big booth and ordered cheeseburgers and chocolate shakes and watched the clock while everyone in the restaurant watched us.

We got to the airport as the sun was coming up over the mountains, but it wasn't open yet, so we sat in the parking lot and waited. When they did open, they were



**Lenny Foster at Puerto (top) and Lazaro. My first extended trip down was with Lenny. He was versatile and usually set the pace, surfing-wise, for everybody. He and I got into a fist fight once while bathing in a river over who got to use the shampoo first. It was after a shrimp boat trip to buy fish and we'd been drinking tequila all day (that we'd brought) with the fishermen during the barter process. Nobody won the fight. We both fell down and decided it was too much work.**



expecting Kenny, and we gladly let them take over. We were all basket cases from lack of sleep, emotional drain and the strain of a 280 mile drive. We said our good-byes to Kenny as he was wheeled away.

We were relieved to have him on the plane, but not sure what to do next. It would soon be too hot to sleep in the back of the van, and if we did, we would be driving back at night. Without really making a conscious decision, we just headed back stopping every hour or so for a cup of coffee. We stopped in Petacalco, which was a half-hour short of our camp for a beer. It had been roughly 24 hours since Kenny was hit by the shark, but the story had already been embellished and was being passed around the town.

As for Kenny, the movie *Jaws* came out just before he returned home and he got a lot more attention from the media than he wanted. His leg healed well.

We broke camp, left signs warning of sharks and went our separate ways. Phone calls were very difficult in the tiny town, so we didn't talk to him again until after we got home a month later.

**Home Remedies** After spending a length of time in a third world country, you run out of supplies from home. Soon you are using the same resources that the locals are using whether it's food, auto parts or medicine. True, you can usually afford the better end of the spectrum, but you are limited to what is available. We learned to observe what the locals did, and do the same. Axiom: Never eat at a restaurant that isn't crowded.

We were in Santa Cruz, a small fishing village south of San Blas that overlooks a perfect left point. The people were friendly and we had gotten to know a young couple: Auggy, Chelsea and their three kids. We became part of their extended family and just by being around him, Auggy

taught us a lot about surviving in Mexico. He taught us how to cook a large fish on top of an open fire without a grill, how to talk our way onto the shrimp trawlers that come down from Mazatlan and anchor off of Santa Cruz, how to make ceviche and some

Sometimes you wonder if the cure is worse than the illness. When it comes to dripping hot wax on an open wound, I prefer a Band Aid and some Neosporin, but it worked and Auggy's wound healed without infection.

We learned to use the wonder drug of the tropics, the coconut. We would drink coconut milk to soothe an upset stomach and eat the meat for constipation. We ate garlic to keep the mosquitoes at bay and to pump up our immune system. We learned to dress our cuts with a mixture of golden seal herb and vitamin E oil. The amazing part was that the local cures almost always worked. If not, you could go to the local pharmacy, describe your ailment and then walk behind the counter and get a shot for about a dollar.

**Urchins** Sometimes in the afternoons I would sit under the shade of the coconut trees and watch the local fisherman stalk their prey. Balancing precariously on the rocks, they would throw their nets out over a school of small fish and pull in the glittering mass. I was always amazed how agile they were as they balanced on the rocks.

One day as I sat there, a young surfer from Texas came by proudly holding the new fishing net he had just purchased from a local tienda. He was on his way down to the rocks to fish. I didn't pay much attention to him, but minutes later I heard a loud scream and looked to see him up to his chest in water frantically struggling to get out. On his first throw he had lost his balance and fallen into the water between the rocks. He had landed feet-first on a giant mass of sea urchins. When I got to him, he had left his new net, dragged himself out of the water and was crawling on his bloody knees, moaning. His feet looked like chocolate chip ice cream, but each black spot was the end of an urchin barb lodged deep in his feet.

What to do? We remembered reading about how the uric acid in urine dissolves urchin spines, but this was too extreme a case to test such remedies on. We tried everything: soaking his feet in vinegar, pulling them out with tweezers, the locals suggested that he stomp his feet in soft sand so that the ends work their way out and they could be pulled out, but in the end nothing worked. The Texan asked for a bottle of tequila and passed out in a chair while soaking his feet. The next day, he was transferred to a hospital in Mexico City.



**The Texan with sea urchin spines in his feet, sedated.**



**A squeeze of lime juice and some candle wax does the trick.**

third world first aid. Auggy cut his foot badly one day so Chelsea had him wash the cut with water then she squeezed lime juice on it to disinfect it. Then she lit a candle and dripped wax over the cut to seal it.

**Auggy (to my right) and I holding a couple of toros, a lowly regarded red meat fish that locals generally used for stew. But Auggie showed us how to grill 'em right on the fire. At that moment, to our deprived taste buds, they tasted remarkably like roast beef.**









**Christmas** In 1976, Chris Wright and I were on our way north after having spent two months in southern Mexico. We arrived in Santa Cruz, a little fishing village just south of San Blas, a few days before Christmas. Miguel was a gringo who lived in a beautiful house right in front of the left point and rumor was that he had originally moved to Mexico with his wife to avoid going to Vietnam. Soon after pulling into town and setting up our camp, Miguel came by to say hi. It was the morning of the day before Christmas, and he was in the spirit of the season so he invited us to spend Christmas with he and his wife. The only hitch was that we had to help him "get dinner." We were grateful for the invitation and happy to help. Miguel told us to meet him at the mouth of the little river that runs through town in an hour and we were going to get started.

When we arrived, Miguel had his old blue Hobie Cat pulled up on the beach waiting for us. On it were two homemade paddles, some masks and snorkles, a large red bucket, two Hawaiian slings, an inner tube with gunny-sacks attached and a heavy six-foot steel prybar. No sails! Miguel told us that we were going to paddle the catamaran out into the ocean then around the point to the south to an area only accessible by boat. There we would get fish and oysters for Christmas dinner.

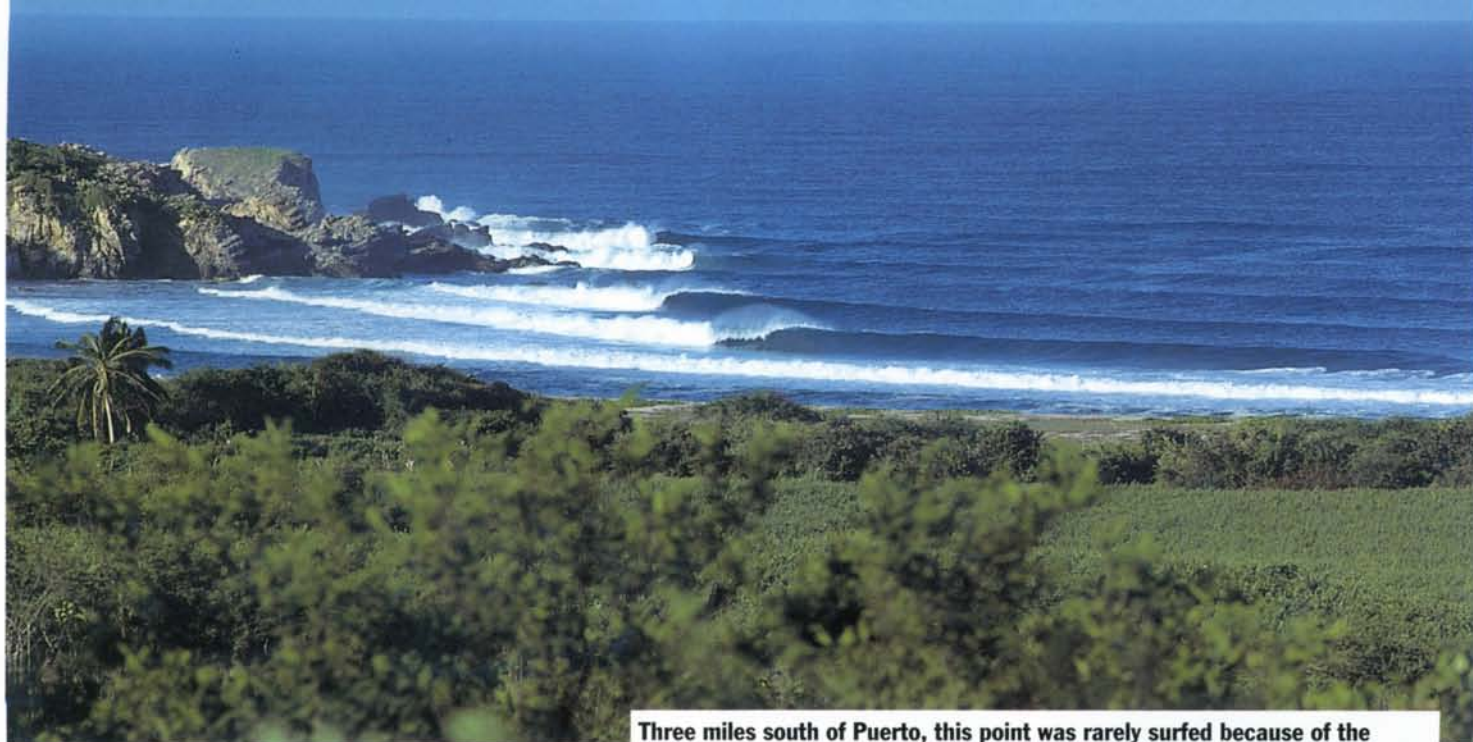
As we paddled out, Miguel drilled us about our experience at getting oysters and spear fishing. He was clearly disappointed with our answers. He decided that he would get the fish and Chris and I would be responsible for the oysters, then proceeded to tell us how to get them.

We anchored at the base of a steep jungle cliff that was completely covered in vegetation. There were light blue waves surging up against the black rocks. Miguel put on his mask, fins and snorkel, grabbed his sling and disappeared over the side. When he was about twenty yards away, he turned around and shouted, "Remember you have to eat all your mistakes. They won't last."

Chris and I looked at each other, and then began to sort through the masks to find one that fit. We grabbed the inner tube, gunnysack and steel bar and set out to get oysters. Miguel had told us to go where the water was about 6-10 feet deep and drop the steel bar. Then take a deep breath, dive down and pick the bar up. The bar's weight would allow us to walk on the bottom as if we were

**Rick Bush, Puerto tube. A seasoned traveler, Rick was on the way home from El Salvador. He had been at La Libertad while John Milius and crew were there shooting the film, *Big Wednesday*, with the point doubling for Malibu. Rick had left when his traveling partner was murdered. While in the third world we became aware that the risk of death in various forms was all around us.**





**Three miles south of Puerto, this point was rarely surfed because of the ungodly walk. If you walked in during the cool of morning, you walked back in the extreme heat of the day, or worse yet in the mosquito clouds of dusk.**

on land as we looked for oysters. When you saw one, take the pointed end of the bar, chip right next to it, the oyster would come right off and then deposit it in the gunnysack so it would live until tomorrow. If you missed and hit the oyster, it would crack the shell and the oyster would die. If that happened, then you "ate your mistakes."

The sun was hot, the water warm, crystal clear and filled with fish, and we could hear the birds' loud squawking in the jungle. The only problem was that we were getting a lot "fuller" than the gunnysack, and being able to get only one oyster with each dive, we were exhausted. We did our best, but the catch was definitely light.

As we paddled back, Miguel told us that his wife had been baking all day and there would be plenty to eat for Christmas. We took our catch to Miguel's house and went back to our camp and slept.

Christmas morning we awoke to Miguel rocking the van and shouting, "Merry Christmas! Get up, it's a beautiful day!" As Chris and I began to stir, Miguel invited us to breakfast at his house. We had been on the road for over two months, so the thought of a "home cooked" breakfast in a real house was the best Christmas present we could have asked for.

The smell of sweet things baking greeted us as Miguel opened the door. Miguel's wife offered us a cup of hot coffee and some freshly baked cookies. The cookies were still warm, crunchy and loaded with chocolate chips. We immediately devoured three each when Miguel suggested that we slow down because he had put a "whole lid in them." Chris and I looked at each other and decided to take his advice.

Some town folk stopped by and informed Miguel that the Mayor of Santa Cruz had changed his plans and he and his family would be coming to Christmas dinner. Miguel panicked! There wasn't going to be enough food!

He reminded Chris and I that we had promised to help him with dinner. We immediately had visions of paddling the Hobie back out for more fish and oysters, but Miguel gave us some cash and asked us to walk to the next village (about a mile away) to buy some fish. He told us that there was a little fish market on the beach and they would be open. We took the money, happy to not be going back out in the boat, but nervous about the cookies. As we started walking down the dusty, jungle-lined road, we kept asking each other, "Do you feel anything? How much do you think he really put in the cookies? How good was it?" We were nervous. We were also uncomfortable about bargaining with Miguel's cash while converting pounds to kilos and pesos to dollars. He had warned us to not get ripped off.

The jungle cleared as we neared the beach, and what we saw scared the hell out of us. The beach was filled with military, all dressed in full uniform with rifles. They were all standing around smoking cigarettes and waiting for fish. The market was empty, but we could see a shrimp boat anchored in the distance. Chris and I felt normal still, so hiding behind our sunglasses, we walked over amongst the military. "Feliz Navidad!" was exchanged over and over.

I could feel that I was coming-on fast. I was getting a disconnected floating feeling as I watched a small row boat slowly making its way toward shore. A couple of the military guys wanted to talk and were peppering me with questions. I could barely talk in English, much less Spanish. Every time I looked up, it didn't seem like the boat was getting any closer.

"Help Mr. Wizard! If you get me out of this I promise I will never...Where's Chris?"

I looked for Chris, but he had crept away and was sitting under a palm tree alone. The boat finally arrived, and to my surprise (and relief) the soldiers told me to go first. I picked



out six fish, gave them all of Miguel's money and stumbled back to Santa Cruz. As I handed the fish to Miguel, he took one look at us and started laughing. When asked for his change, I told him the soldiers had it.

**Dining Out** As we moved further off of the beaten path and our supply of gringo food depleted, we were forced to eat what was available in Mexico. I had been driving for seven hours, and it was hot and muggy. We were thirsty and hungry. I pulled over in front of a palapa with a rusty Coca-Cola sign nailed to a corner post.



**Prepared for barter on our way out to the shrimp boats (which are at sea for 2-3 months at a time). Our barter goods—alcohol and Playboy magazines. We also brought drop lines to fish off the boat as they chummed while sorting their catch.**

As we walked into the shade of the palapa, every eye was on us and every child and dog for miles around was at our feet. We smiled as we brushed flies and the remnants of a meal off a cool metal table. We sat down, all the time keeping one eye on the car. The floor of the restaurant was uneven, moist dirt that had been padded smooth by the soles of thousands of feet.

In our preparation for the trip, I had bought the book *The Peoples' Guide to Mexico*, and it had become

our Bible. From reading it we knew that there was not going to be a menu, but all we had to do was say the letters "K I?" (¿Que hay?) which means, what is there, and they would tell us everything they have. Sounded simple enough. An old man walked over to our table and said something I didn't understand, so I nodded and smiled. I spit out what I had been practicing. "K I?" He shot back a list of everything that was available so rapidly the only word we understood was "huevos." It worked, kind of! For

the next three meals, we ate nothing but huevos, before out of desperation, we slowly expanded our vocabulary.

## Mosquitoes

When you see photos of lush jungles and palm trees, you think of paradise, but what you should think about is mosquitoes. We camped on the beach at Lazaro Cardenas for three months, and during that time the mosquitoes dictated our schedule and dress.

We learned to have mosquito clothes; a pair of long pants, a long-sleeved T-shirt and socks all soaked in mosquito repellent (a very precious commodity in certain parts of Mexico).

We'd never wash them because we'd just have to coat them again. Everyday we wore our mosquito clothes from an hour before sunset until sunrise.

Mosquitoes are attracted to heat. At night after the light-house light went on, we watched clouds of mosquitoes chase it in circles 500 feet about our camp. In the morning when we lit the stove inside our tent, mosquitoes would swarm outside the window. The early morning surf check was done wearing a large sombrero with mosquito netting draped over it like a beekeeper. The worst time with the mosquitoes was whenever we had the runs. There we were outside in the middle of the night with our pants down around our ankles providing a big white target for even the laziest mosquito.

**On The Road** Driving in Mexico is both an art and sport, but always dangerous. There are certain rules that you have to respect if not always obey:

1. No long drives on Sunday. Sunday is the day to get "barracho" (drunk) in Mexico. So every Sunday is like driving after midnight on New Year's Eve.
2. Avoid driving at night whenever possible. Cows and horses are allowed to run free and hitting them is just like hitting a car (except you get shit all over you). They have no lights or reflectors.
3. If someone wants to pass, let them, even if you have to slow way down, because "death before dishonor" is the prevailing rule of the road.
4. Checkpoints: Throughout Mexico there are military checkpoints manned by boys with machine guns. Usually these are fairly routine, but they can sometimes get ugly. The military is not above planting a small quantity of pot in your car to force a bribe, so we always stayed with them as they checked. We found the most effective way of dealing with checkpoints was to hang a Playboy foldout strategically so that it was the first thing they saw when they opened the door. As soon as the door was opened, their attitude changed and the conversation turned to "gringas." The bad part was they didn't want us to leave.
5. The rig: A VW bus was the absolute perfect car for southern Mexico. Four-wheel drives are good for Baja, but not the mainland. They are expensive to run and difficult to maintain. VW buses are reliable, cheap to drive and parts were available. Besides, they have good traction and a lot of room, but not very safe in an accident. We didn't wear seat



**Mosquito rigged for the early morning surf check while the rest of us hid in our tents.**

**Brian Bradford's Puerto peak. I was swimming then got caught in the rip. As it swept me out to sea, for a brief moment I was in perfect position to capture his ride. But it was a long swim in.**











belts and we used to joke that our only salvation in a wreck was to fly through the windshield. We were set up with a bed and food cupboard in back and a 12 foot aluminum boat on the roof over the boards. A 3 hp. engine for the boat was mounted directly behind the driver's seat.

6. Auto insurance: Today I wouldn't even consider driving in Mexico without insurance, but back then it was a luxury we couldn't afford.

7. Wildlife: Anyone who has spent any time on the road in the tropics knows the wild variety of weird animals you run over and scrape off your windshield.

Once I had a Pemex gasoline truck tailgating me on a narrow winding jungle road with its brights on. Suddenly around one corner was a snake across the road the size of a speed bump. The truck was on my tail so I didn't even bother to slow down as it made a sickening squish under my tires and bounced us off the roof of the van.

Another time we were driving in the heat of the day wearing just trunks and slaps. It was unbearably hot so I turned the wind-wing in so it was blowing directly on me. It was a great idea and we were cruising comfortably until we hit a swarm of bees. We were jamming at 60 mph, when all of a sudden the windshield was black and yellow with smearing bee guts, and bees were being shot through the wind-wing at my chest, belly and crotch. I slammed on the brakes as dazed bees crawled all over me, but we couldn't jump out of the car because there were bees everywhere. Luckily the bees were as scared and confused as we were, and they just crawled on us and around the floor. We took off our flip-flops and madly started smashing them. That was the last time we drove with the wind-wing open.

**Sea Food** Chris Wright and I had been camping at Puerto Escondido for about a month when Herman, a local kid, asked us to go fishing with him. Herman had a severe limp from polio, but that didn't stop him from being one of the best athletes in town. Puerto Escondido is a gnarly, unforgiving wave, not exactly a good place to learn to surf, but Herman was there every-day. I saw him take horrible wipeouts in big powerful waves. I asked him if he was ever afraid while surfing, and he looked at me as though confused by the question, then answered, "The ocean is my mother. Why would she want to hurt me?" He played frisbee, surfed and swam, but what he did best was fish.

The surf wasn't good one morning, so Chris and I walked over to where Herman and his brother Fernando were launching their boat and we saw their fishing gear; a

small net for bait and a couple of large rusty tin cans with a heavy gauge fishing line (300 lb. test) wrapped around it. That was it except for some bread rolls, a bucket and a knife. Their life was simple and Herman was simply harvesting the food growing in the ocean. He asked us if we would like to go with them. We jumped at the chance.

Herman was giving us the grand tour of the area as he trolled for fish. Hooking a good sized dorado on one of his rusty cans, he tugged once to set the hook then dropped the can and fought the fish holding the thick line bare-handed. After he pulled the shimmering lime green fish into the boat, he gave it a big kiss and dropped it into the boat. His innocent excitement was great to see.

Suddenly, Fernando fired up the engine and we took off in a lurch as he yelled something we couldn't understand at Herman. Herman leaned on the rail of the boat as we sped toward something Chris and I couldn't see. Herman leapt out of the boat and into the water with a war cry. We didn't see what was happening until Fernando had whipped the boat back around. Herman was fighting to keep a sea turtle that moments before was mating on the surface. It was trying to swim away. Fernando drove the boat alongside, reached over and pulled the turtle into the boat.

Chris and I froze, we knew that turtles were protected so what were they going to do? Maybe they were just going to check it out and throw it back. The turtle was in the bottom of the boat crying and frantically flapping its flippers trying to get away. Chris and I began to see what was coming and told them they should just let the turtle go. Herman replied that he had already let the female go so she could lay her eggs, but they needed the meat from the male.

Our hearts sank as he flipped the turtle over and plunged his knife into the turtle's belly. Chris and I weren't sure what to feel. There was blood everywhere. We watched in silence as he fileted the turtle into a small bucket of meat.

Herman and Fernando had nothing except a shack, a boat and whatever they could harvest from "their mother ocean." Who were we to judge? But at the same time there was a lot to eat without killing turtles. What's so special about turtles? What is the difference between the turtle and beautiful dorado he had just caught?

Somehow reason didn't make it feel any better. As we headed back to the bay, Chris and I felt like we were party to some awful crime, but Herman and Fernando were stoked. Their family was going to eat well that night.



**Chris Wright and I were looking for surf one day and ended up stalled in a torrential downpour in the middle of a coastal date palm plantation. This man came and asked if we wished to share the shelter of the caretaker's hut where he and his family lived. We communicated with them for hours, long after our Spanish and his English ran out.**

**(clockwise from bottom left) A lustful couple. Herman swimming the male to the boat. The coup de grace blew our minds and we struggled with it mentally for the rest of the day.**





Looking back at the town of Puerto Escondido from the point.

**Surf Spots** In the seventies, localism was alive and well in Mexico. Much to the amazement of the Mexicans, gringo surfers from Southern California were trying to stake out their turf on mainland Mexico. This made for a lot of tension about pictures being taken, but all of the articles of the time had no names of any sort and most never even mentioned that the spots were in Mexico.

**Lazaro Cardenas** Lenny Foster and I were told about Lazaro by three surfers from Long Beach. We were heading south and they were on their way home. They told us of good camping, fishing and excellent waves. We were not to be disappointed.

Lazaro Cardenas sits at the mouth of the Rio Balsa, the largest river in the country. The Japanese were working with Mexico to build a huge commercial port there so the

promise of jobs had spread widely. In a matter of months, this little town resembled the California gold rush! The streets were packed 24 hours a day and all systems were radically overloaded. Workers and their families were sleeping in the streets. Luckily we were camped on the beach about two miles out of town and in our own serene world, just the mosquitoes and us.

There were two waves at Lazaro, both beach breaks. One broke on a finger-like sandbar that stretched out in front of the lighthouse. It was a left and a right with an almond shaped barrel and was the most consistent spot. The other was less consistent and was called "Micronesia." It broke near the jetty at the river mouth, an extremely hollow left that accounted for most of our injuries including the shark attack. Two years after the shark attack, I returned to Lazaro Cardenas with Chris Wright and Brian Hughes amongst others. We had spent months surfing there before





Kenny's attack so we figured, "What were the odds of it happening again?" On our first go-out, we were chased out of the water by a large Mako. I haven't been back since, but I hear the break has been destroyed and the whole area is an environmental disaster.

## Puerto Escondido

In the early seventies, this out of the way low-key resort with its unpaved dusty streets and few hotels was a sort of backpacker's Acapulco. There were no big commercial flights in or out, but the weather and beaches were beautiful, food and accommodations were cheap and there were few mosquitoes. There were basically four groups that traveled there; Mexican families who drove down from Oaxaca or Acapulco, younger Europeans on a cheap holiday, gringos on a drug vacation and surfers. The local people seemed to love the surfers. The Euros would sit in a restaurant for

hours with just a cup of coffee and a cigarette reading their books and rarely tipping. The druggies would go off into the mountains of Oaxaca and go "shrooming" (foraging for magic mushrooms) for a couple of days and come back burned out zombies. But the surfers would surf all morning then hit a restaurant to devour more of the cheap food than the proprietor had ever seen anyone eat, then return in the afternoon to drink mucho cold beers. There were surfers from California, Texas, the East Coast as well as Brazil and Australia. It was a place where

surfers actually had some commercial clout. Restaurants and hotels tried to cater to the surfer's tastes by offering things like "hotcakes con frutas," large glasses of fresh squeezed juices and even granola. It was a lot of fun!

There are basically two waves at Puerto: a series of beach breaks just outside of town and a left point about two miles south. Puerto faces south and there is virtually no continental shelf, so the swell comes charging in, untamed, jacks up and pitches out, forming huge barrels, but is far from always perfect. You have to choose your days and waves. Like all beach breaks, it is fickle.

The point doesn't break often, but it can be a clean and powerful left. Sharks are known to hang in the area.

**Pacific Lines** In 1977, Jose Lozano and Marty Gilcrest along with some other friends and I started *Pacific Lines*, a monthly tabloid modeled after *Tracks* from Australia. We decided to take a trip to Puerto Escondido for editorial photos. Marty and Jose left a week before I did. They were going to pick me up at the airport in Acapulco and we would drive the 300 miles south to Puerto.

I loaded my camera equipment into an ammo box, loaded a large backpack, got my 7'6" Russell pintail and hopped on an Aeromexico flight from Tijuana to Acapulco. It was Easter week, and my flannel shirt and corduroy bell-bottoms were the perfect clothes for a cold California day, but a terrible choice for the humid heat of southern Mexico. I was dripping in sweat as I struggled to carry all of my gear through the airport looking for Jose and Marty.

"Hey meester! I help you! Where you go?" I heard as a hand tried to yank the camera case out of my hand.



**View of our camp at Lazaro shot from the lighthouse. An ugly place covered with the dredged tailings from the River Balsa, but the surf there was a thing of beauty.**





(LEFT TO RIGHT) LOUIS FROM BRAZIL, DAN FLECKY, PAUL HEUSSENSTAMM, LENNY FOSTER

# A partial cast of characters

**Paul Heussenstamm:** His surfing would come alive as the surf got bigger. He wouldn't hesitate to take off on anything and charge it with reckless abandon. One of my funniest memories of him was when he went to the local farmacia to buy some condoms. Paul didn't know the

sitting outside a tienda in the late afternoon drinking a soda when the conversation went to rip-offs. He told us that he had rented a house with two other surfers on the point at La Libertad. They were awakened one night by the sound of burglars in the house. Rick and his two buddies chased the two burglars through the dark deserted streets when the burglars split up. Rick and his friend went after one and their roommate went after the other. The burglar eluded Rick so he and his roommate went to look for their friend. They found him dead laying on a deserted street in a pool of his own blood. He had one stab wound in the chest. Rick had to call his friend's parents. He had just left El Salvador and was heading north when he arrived at Puerto Escondido.

**Greg Pautsch:** Although Greg is from Newport Beach, I really got to know him in southern Mexico. He quietly did his own thing, kicked

word in Spanish and the pharmacist had no idea what he was talking about, so he launched into an elaborate pantomime of his intended use. The pharmacist didn't know if he had a bladder infection or a stomach ache. Pretty soon everyone in the store was trying to guess as Paul stood there thrusting his pelvis and making roll-on motions with his hands. A few years later Paul opened Newport Surf & Sport, one of the most influential surf shops in California. Now he paints, travels, fishes and surfs.

**Rick Bush** is a mason in the Long Beach area now, but the photo sequence of Rick Bush getting that incredible barrel always reminds me of his story about El Salvador. We were



back in a hammock with his book and a cold beer, but when he hit the water, he charged. Greg reached his peak of popularity when he was traveling with a gal who would go out on a bodyboard topless at the beach break in town. Everyone (locals and gringos) always found an excuse to sit on the beach and talk to Greg waiting for her to come in.

**Pat Tobin:** A little guy with coke bottle glasses who had married a local girl and whose surfing exploits had risen to mythical proportions. We had heard stories about an artist from Laguna Beach who rode Peta at its biggest on a 9'6" gun with razor sharp downrails. He was the reigning enforcer at Petacalco.

**Billy Pells:** I was at a laundromat in Newport Beach the night before I was going to fly down to Puerto Escondido when Billy walked in. As I waited for my things to dry, I told him about my upcoming trip. Three days later I was on the beach getting ready to paddle out and looked up to see Billy walking towards me with his board under his arm. He had listened closely.



Billy came to surf. He was almost always the first one to paddle out no matter how big it was, even if there was no one else on the beach. He had a calm, smooth style, even in the face of adversity, on either land or water. Through a comedy of errors by the police, Billy was accidentally shot in the leg while they were trying to arrest him for possession of marijuana. He was flown by jet helicopter to Oaxaca, thrown in jail and pumped full of antibiotics and downers for a week. On Cinco de Mayo, the chief of police let him out, handed him a bottle of tequila and invited him to dinner at his home. The next time I saw him was back in Newport Beach. He was about to return to Oaxaca and said the chief was picking him up, so he was bringing him some *Penthouse* magazines, Canadian whiskey and cigars. Billy continually flirted with disaster but always found a way to survive. (Pells recently died on Kauai in an accident at Kalihiwai Falls.)

**Richard Casperson:** In the '70s, Richard was a philosopher and writer, but most of all an excellent waterman and traveler. Richard and





I shared a small bungalow near the beach for six weeks back in 1977. Although we would argue about politics and life, we were on the same wave length when it came to traveling and surfing.

**Tim Hinkle:** A quiet, low-key guy from south Orange County who had an uncanny ability for tube riding. He married a Mexican girl and has lived in Puerto Escondido ever since.

**Geoff McCoy:** A shaper from Australia was working to establish McCoy Surfboards in the United States to take advantage of Australia's success in the world of surfing. Geoff worked closely with Quiksilver and Rip Curl, who were just getting going in the U.S. McCoy surfboards were based in Newport Beach, so when a group from there planned a trip to Mexico, Geoff came too. He had heard horror stories about "touristas" in Mexico and he didn't want to get sick, so he brought enough "rice bubbles" (Rice Krispies) to last the entire trip. He ate rice bubbles morning, noon and night. I am sure he has never been back to Mexico.

**Pat O'Neill:** I was hired by Pat to be O'Neill's Southern California rep and three weeks later we were sitting in the lineup at Puerto. What a job! Pat had traveled extensively and fit right into the pace both on land and in the water. When we got back, Pat told me it was time to go to work and that I should go look in the mirror because I would never be that tan again.

**Bob McKnight:** McKnight was exploring left points in the South Pacific during the mid-'70s while I was spending time in southern Mexico. I would stop by Quiksilver (then operating out of a Quonset hut up on Goat Hill in Costa Mesa), and hit him up for trunks before each trip. Then in '78 he ventured south with us. The combination of big wave experience (South Pacific) and knowing how to deal with a shifting beach break (Newport Beach) served him well at Puerto Escondido.

**Jon Van Ornum:** I took a picture of John scowling at me on the beach when he was waxing his board to go out one day. When we got

back and showed the shot to his mom, she said I was a great talent because I had successfully captured his personality. Van Ornum's driving surf style blended well with power waves.

**Mike Hischer:** Mike and I left our ladies on the beach at Puerto to paddle alone into 8-10' surf. As we paddled out, a huge set appeared on the horizon and we barely made it over the top of the first wave. On the second one, Mike got sucked back a bit, but with adrenaline pumping, scratched on over and out towards the third. As I paddled down the back of the third wave, I saw the nose of Mike's board and the top of his head pop through the back of the wave for an instant before he was sucked backwards over the falls on the biggest wave of the trip. Mike almost drowned as he got severely pummeled in the impact zone. Exhausted, he dragged himself up onto the beach and staggered over to where Phyllis, his wife, sat engrossed in her book. "Hi honey! You didn't stay out long. Was it fun?"



**John Crezenski (Prune):** A long-haired hippy who had ridden a motorcycle with a surfboard strapped to the side from New York to Lazaro Cardenas, Mexico. He was somewhere between brave and nuts! He had one of the earliest personal sound systems: a speaker mounted inside his helmet. He said the high-

light of the ride was flying through the mountain roads with tunes cranked up.

**Dan Flecky:** I took Dan to Puerto for a photo shoot his first time there, and he surfed it with a powerful Hawaiian style. He returned a month after our trip with a group of surfers



and a film crew. About a year ago he reminded me that I got really pissed at him for exposing our "secret spot." Dan owns a silk screen business in Newport Beach that does a lot of business for the surf industry and his life still revolves around surfing.

**Jack Briggs:** When Jack first arrived, he told me that there was no way that any wave could be anymore powerful than 56th St. in Newport. It could be bigger, but ounce for ounce, they would be the same in power. Luckily for him, the next two days were small, but the third day it jumped up and demanded his respect. The fourth day, Paul Heussenstamm and I came back from a surf check, and as we walked in the door Jack says, "I've been laying here listening to the pounding of the waves. Please don't tell me it's bigger!" It was, but we lied and Jack surfed it well.

**Miguel** The originator of the Agua board (no fins, just deep channels) who had dodged the draft by moving to Mexico. He had built a beautiful house on the point in Santa Cruz, Mexico, that looked out on a perfect left point (the spot was made famous by a *Surfer* /Ron Stoner poster in the early seventies).



BOB MCKNIGHT





"No!" I shouted as I tugged the camera case back. "My friends are picking me up!"

"...But your friends aren't here, they aren't coming!"

"They will be." I argued. "They're just late."

I sat down on a bench in the crowded airport and continued to survey the crowd hoping he was wrong. There were a lot of white pants, flowered shirts and big hats getting into hotel vans, rental cars and taxis. Time passed and the crowd became just me and the airport workers waiting for the next flight. The cold marble floor was nice relief from the heat, but it magnified the emptiness of the airport. I suddenly felt stranded.

"Hey meester! I told you they weren't coming!" The kid was back. "What's in the box?"

"Guns and ammo!" I said, frowning at him.

He ran over to his friends and they all stared at me from across the airport. I changed into a T-shirt and checked the airline for messages. Nothing! Where are those assholes! A car wreck? Jail? Bandidos? The surf was probably good so they stayed in Puerto. I waited as two more flights landed and dispersed into the city. I decided to go into Acapulco and catch a bus south to Puerto Escondido. The kids were convinced that I was CIA and were fascinated. They told me to catch any hotel shuttle into town then catch the "Fletcha Roja" (Red Arrow) south. It was a third class bus, but it was the only one that went that way. Sounded easy enough.

As I rode the shuttle into town, the rider told me the Fletcha Roja didn't leave again until the next morning. As I stared out the window, Acapulco looked like Palm Springs or Daytona Beach during Easter week. There were twice as many people as the city could handle. People were camping on the median strip of the highway and on the beaches down to the water's edge. There were no hotel rooms! None! I got off at the last hotel on the route and told the bell hop my dilemma. He said that for \$5 he would lock up things, let me sleep on a lounge chair by the pool and then give me a ride to the bus depot on his way home from work at 5:30 a.m.

I had no options, so I handed him my ammo box, big lens, pack and surfboard. I asked for a receipt. He couldn't give me one because I wasn't a guest. He handed me a towel. As I started to walk away he called after me, "When the guard comes by, act like a drunk guest who's passed out at the pool. Don't wake-up, even if he nudges you with his flashlight."

The mosquitoes were terrible, but the guard never did come by so I got a few hours of sleep. It was pitch black out

**Paul Heussenstamm into various phases of Puerto. Paul comes alive in big surf. It seems to smooth out the angles of his personality. The big wave energy matches his.**





**Max McDonald. He and Greg Martz would shoot down for two weeks via plane. He was a party animal, upbeat and fun while we'd driven long and hard and slugged it out to be there. Two different worlds completely. But he charged out in the water just as hard.**

when the bell hop started shaking me saying, "Vamanos! Your things are in my truck, but we have to hurry."

I got on the rickety old red bus, being followed by the sleepy stares of all the local people. As I lay my surfboard in the aisle blocking six rows of seats, I smiled. No one smiled back. It was still dark out when the crowded bus groaned and sputtered out of the station leaving behind a big cloud of black smoke. There were cages filled with chickens on top of the bus, giant bags of oranges, beans and other food inside. The bus stopped every three miles to let someone on or off, and each time I'd jump up to look out the window to make sure no one was taking my stuff out of the outside luggage compartments. About the time the first rays of the sun were shooting over the horizon, the Fletcha Roja stopped and didn't start again. The old bus had died in the middle of nowhere! We all got out and sat by the side of the road like this was the most normal thing. I asked the driver what we would do next and he showed me the big puddle of oil on the road then said that we would wait for another bus. I assumed that someone going the other way would report the broken down bus and would send another. I was wrong.

Two hours had passed and it was really hot. Although I was dressed like the locals, my T-shirt and bellbottom cords were too hot for me. The problem was I couldn't get to my pack to change without unloading everyone's luggage. Finally another bus appeared in the distance through the heat waves rippling off the pavement. As it neared, it was obvious it wasn't ours because it was already full of people, chickens and food, but everyone cheered as it slowed to a

stop. In fifteen minutes the contents of our dead bus were squeezed inside the new old bus except for me. My luggage was below but my surfboard and I were standing outside. They told me to push my way in through the back door, but there was no room for the board so I would have to stand in the aisle with my board on my head. I rode the bus for two hours with one hand holding my board on my head and my other hand keeping me steady. The heat and stench on the bus made it difficult to breathe. I began to plot the torture death of Marty and Jose.

As we moved further away from Acapulco, the crowd on the bus thinned and I was able to first put the board down and then sit down. I was dehydrated and exhausted when the bus stopped at a small town for lunch and siesta. I had very few pesos left and the store owners weren't about to take a traveler's check, so I bought a roll and a bottle of "agua con gas" for lunch and a pair of slaps so I could take my earth shoes off. I rolled my pants up to my knees and took my shirt off. Except for my blonde hair and blue eyes, I looked and smelt like everyone else on the bus. After a short siesta we took off again, but now the bus was only one-third full and breeze through the windows made it comfortable. Jose and Marty can live.

I stepped off the bus onto the highway above Puerto Escondido in the heat of the late afternoon. I put my heavy pack on my back, strapped my lens to my back like a gun, carried my ammo case in one hand and surfboard in the other as I started down the dusty road toward the beach. I was staggering under the heat and the weight by the time I got to a little hotel on the beach, but...I was there!





**Richard Casperson. His style of traveling in Mexico was tuned. He knew when to push, when to back off, the kind of stuff you can only learn on the road.**

The owner told me he was sorry but the hotel was full. I told him that I was meeting some friends and could he put my things in their room. I described Jose and Marty to him and he tells me they checked out two days ago.

Deja Vu! I told him that I would be staying for three weeks and asked if he could lock up my gear until a room was available. He said there would be a room tomorrow but I would have to sleep on the beach that night. It was getting dark, so I ate, then grabbed my Swiss Army knife and canvas board sock and walked about a half mile down the beach away from town to sleep. I laid in the middle of the beach so I wasn't too close to the bushes (snakes and scorpions), or the water (nocturnal crabs run all over you). It was dark out as I made a pillow out of a beach towel and slid into the board bag like I was preparing for a potato sack race. I fit in the bag perfectly with my arms out, but I

was getting bit by mosquitoes so I forced my arms in until I was stuck at the shoulders.

Just as I started to dose, I could see the silhouettes of a crowd in the town lights. I could hear yelling and see them shoving each other. Suddenly I realized that they were running toward me and fast. I doubted that they had seen me, so I decide to go hide in the bushes...but I am stuck in the board bag. I cannot free my shoulders. I start to flop like a spastic inch worm across the sand toward the bushes but stop, thinking that my commotion will attract them. As they get closer, I can see that it is about 25 drunk guys playing a very physical game, kicking a soccer ball down the beach, stark naked!

Marty and Jose will die!

One of them kicked the ball hard and it stopped about ten feet from where I lay. I opened the three inch





blade of my knife even though it was stuck inside the bag with my arms. As three guys raced to get the ball, I laid perfectly still, but they saw me and came to inspect. I pretended to be asleep as they called over the rest of the group. The group silently stared at me through the darkness, then I hear the sound of someone peeing, then two, then everyone. I expected the worst, but twenty-five guys just stood there peeing, fifteen feet from my head. Then one kicked the ball toward the water and they were gone, running down the beach again.

The next morning I awoke to offshore winds pushing back the tops of six foot perfect barrels, and the whole trip was worth it. Marty and Jose can live!

**Last Chapter** It has been twenty years since we first traveled into southern Mexico, not sure

where we were going, but in search of surf. We found surf, but we found so much more. I am still in awe of Mexico; the country, its people and its waves. These trips were taken at a period in our lives when we had more time than money, so we could flow with whatever happened. We could really slow down and enjoy what Mexico had to offer. Now we have commitments; jobs, family, Little League, etc., that do not allow us the wealth of time to do those kind of trips, but the experience still awaits whoever wants it. As roads are built, new areas are accessible and new breaks are discovered. No one is going to say where they are, but they exist just the same. Surfing is the draw, but the Mexico experience is so much broader. The people of Mexico are beautiful and open, with so much to teach about living the kind of simple lifestyle that rarely exists in the United States today.



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