

Introduction to Cabo Pulmo

This book is a chronicle of my forty-five-year fascination with an extraordinary five-mile stretch of coastline located along the East Cape of Mexico's Baja California Peninsula. Cabo Pulmo (Cape Lung) is an isolated, fifty-foot-high volcanic beach remnant forming a minor headland (Pulmo Head) at the northern end of this shoreline.

The village of Cabo Pulmo is situated a quarter of a mile south of Pulmo Head. The open, two-mile-wide indentation forming Pulmo Bay extends south from the Head, ending abruptly at Frailes Mountain, the easternmost extension of the Baja Peninsula. This massive 800-foot-high mountain headland faces the city of Mazatlan on the Mexican mainland, a hundred and twenty-five miles across the mouth of the Gulf of California. Frailes Mountain's mile-long run seaward hides most of the East Cape's coastline south of Cabo Pulmo. On the south side of the mountain lie Frailes Bay and its exotic submarine canyon, an underwater crevasse rising from the offshore depths into the shallows at the southwest corner of the half-mile-long shelter.

The major attraction at Cabo Pulmo lies below the waterline immediately in front of Pulmo Village. Only yards off the sandy point at the south end of the original six-dwelling community, the innermost of Pulmo's hard-coral-covered volcanic reef strands angles offshore (aerial photo on p. 14). This nearly square mile of reefs, the most northerly hard coral complex on the Pacific coast of the Western Hemisphere, has long been a major attraction for Mexican fishermen and market divers. The reefs have more recently become popular with American big game divers from Southern California and Arizona. In 1995, 7000 hectares, including the reefs and their terrestrial surroundings, were established by the Mexican government as the Cabo Pulmo National Marine Park.

The first of the thirty-four chapters in this chronicle begins in 1966. The book recounts sixteen summers spent camping on the beach in front of the fishing and ranching village of Cabo Pulmo. Much of this narrative relates the endless hours I spent spearfishing and exploring Pulmo's reefs and the submarine canyon at Frailes Bay. A great deal of the writing involves the terrestrial half of the twenty-seven square mile Cabo Pulmo National Marine Park. It is about the people of the East Cape, both Mexican and *norteamericano*. It recounts daily encounters in the tiny hamlets and *ranchos* along the coast. It is a reminder of what it was like to live alongside the villagers and to visit with the local ranch

families. The subsistence culture of the rural Mexicans living along the shores of the Gulf of California forces endless comparisons between their meager needs and the complexities of the materialism considered indispensable to the happiness of people living elsewhere in North America.

Traveling in Baja with extended stays at Pulmo and Los Frailes has been a major force sustaining me through thirty years of teaching fifth and sixth graders in El Cajon, California, an eastern suburb of San Diego. San Diego was the perfect jump-off point for the thousand-mile odyssey to Pulmo's secluded location ninety-five miles south of La Paz. This isolated city, capital of the old territory of southern Baja, became the capital of the state of Baja California del Sur in 1974.

The book begins with the first trip my wife, Genie, and I made to Cabo Pulmo in 1966. At that time, driving down the mainland of Mexico to Mazatlan for the ferry crossing to La Paz was the only alternative to the overland dirt track down the Peninsula. Our second sojourn to Pulmo two years later involved a roundabout approach north from La Paz on the overland dirt road to the old mission capital of Loreto. It also included a short trip north of Loreto to Mulegé. From my fifth trip to my last, I drove the paved Transpeninsular Highway down Baja, which was completed in 1973.

Because I did not plan to write about Cabo Pulmo, I did not keep notes or a diary about my trips. Basically I have written from memory with help from dated photos and the somewhat sketchy memories of other people involved in these adventures. All the events, people, and places are real. The names of many people included in the writing have been fictionalized because of the difficulty of obtaining their permission for publication. Except for two cases of literary license necessitated by circumstances, all of the accounts are correct from my recollection. Certain details are probably not entirely accurate. The historical events related to me through the years by both Mexicans and *norteamericanos* are quite naturally in the eyes of the beholders and are factually in conflict in many cases. This is especially true for happenings concerning the long and constant conflicts over ownership of the village land and various sections of the adjoining coastline. It is hard to disagree with the characterization I heard from one of the participants in this saga who referred to Cabo Pulmo as Cabo Lio (Cape Trouble).