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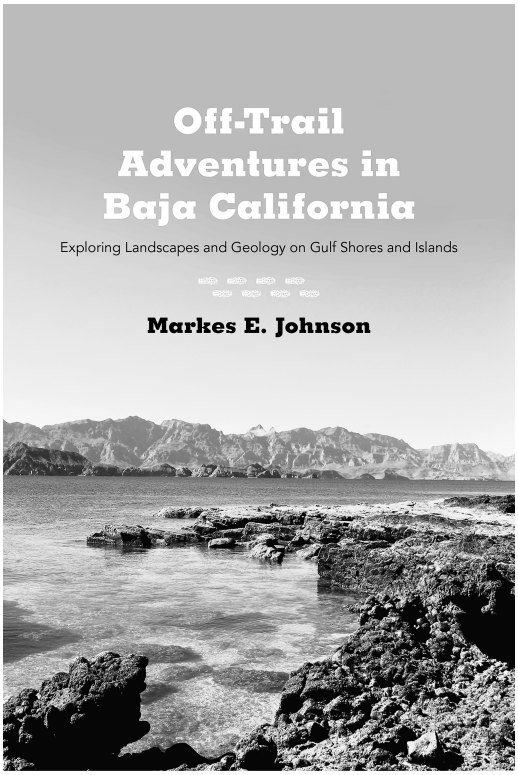
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BOOK REVIEW

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Off-Trail Adventures in Baja California: Exploring Landscapes and Geology on Gulf Shores and Islands. By Johnson, M.E., 2014. Tucson, Arizona: The University of Arizona Press, 272p. 51 photographs (16 color), 17 illustrations. ISBN 978-0-8165-2130-2. $19.95 Paperback; electronic edition available.



The opening passage reads as follows:

> Experiencing the high desert around Cataviña is like reaching an abrupt warp in the time-space continuum. The rocks, topography, and native vegetation all conspire to bring you to a place of such singular contrasts that the tableau might be imagined to exist on another planet outside our solar system. No spacecraft for intergalactic travel is necessary. (Johnson, 2014, p. 3)

This book, written by Professor Emeritus Markes E. Johnson (Williams College), was an utter delight to read as it is equal parts entertaining and informative. Baja California serves as a unique landscape that provides a plethora of geomorphological and ecological anomalies. Having been there myself, I can honestly say that this peninsular strip of desert land and islands nestled between the Pacific Ocean and the Gulf of California is none like I've ever seen elsewhere. That is why the opening passage of the book resonated true with my own experiences, and it adequately sets the stage for the adventure on which you are about to embark while reading.

As much as the landscape in Baja California is fascinating from a scientific standpoint, it can also be very daunting and even dangerous if you do not know where to venture. Therefore, I would consider this essential reading for those travelers exploring the untamed wonders of Baja California's Gulf Coast. The book is set up in a very user-friendly format, with it almost being a combination of a field guide and a road map. For each chapter, there is a comprehensive review of the geology, geography, and ecology of a particular area; however, the composition then becomes more personal. Told mostly in first person, Dr. Johnson takes you on separate adventures that make you feel like you are trekking right beside him. He provides local landmarks and workable distances so that if you ever find yourself there, you could retrace his steps to see in person what he describes in print. An assortment of maps, illustrations, and photographs accompany his writing and help to give you a full appreciation for this part of the world. As one who much prefers the field to the lab, this book made me feel as though I was truly part of the expedition, and that quality invigorated me while I was reading.

The locations described in the book start in the north and work their way southeast along the narrow peninsula, using Mexican Federal Highway I as the main access road. The first adventure starts with the Cataviña Boulder Field, where a short hike brings you to massive granite surface exposures. It is widely considered that these exposures are the vestiges of great granite plutons that were once buried miles below the surface of the Earth. However, continuous erosion eventually led to the *unroofing* of the granite boulders that can be seen today. Another location is the Isla Angel de la Guarda, which is the second largest of the Gulf of California's islands at approximately 67.6 km long and 9.6 km wide. The island's geology is punctuated by six main components: Cretaceous granite, Miocene andesite, Miocene fluvial deposits, Pliocene basalt, Pliocene siltstone, and Quaternary alluvial deposits. Among the many features found during this expedition were great sea stacks along the southeast shores and vast stromatolitic mats along the margins of tidal lagoons.

Each chapter provides a whole new adventure, as you are both educated and transported to the following regions: the great sand ramp of El Quelital, San Francisquito's Ancient Bay, the lost lagoons of Bahía Concepción, the tectonic fractures at El Mangle, a coral reef atop a volcano at Isla Coronados, and the fossil record of Isla Monserrat. I applaud Dr. Johnson for composing such a text that is as informative as any field guide, yet as entertaining as any adventure novel. In my opinion, you will not be disappointed to have this publication on your bookshelf.

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