

Sonoran Adventure: A 1981 Journey

BERNARD L. FONTANA

Reading one's field diary that is more than thirty years old is inevitably a great source of embarrassment.

This journal of a three-day trip, one that was neither my first nor last adventure in the same area, is a reminder of how events become conflated and exaggerated in memory with each telling. I have entertained friends with unintentionally embroidered stories about the wonders of this part of northern Sonora on many occasions. Even now I am (successfully) fighting the temptation to add a few recollections absent from the version seen below, one that was typed originally between February 12 and 13 and on February 15, 1982, itself an elaboration of a handwritten text compiled on May 3–4, 1981 from memory and from sketchy notes taken on the trip several days earlier.

This final account, that of February 1982, includes input from recall of the trip by traveling companion Father Kieran McCarty. It also enjoys the advantage of perusal of photographs taken on the trip but not yet developed when the handwritten manuscript was created. Our fellow traveler, Nat Owings, died in Santa Fe, New Mexico, in 1984 at the age of 81, and he was not consulted, although he received a copy of the manuscript and accompanying photographs before he died.

The Sonora River Valley, the principal focus of this diary, was perhaps first brought to the widespread attention of English readers by Paul Roca's 1967 volume *Paths of the Padres through Sonora: An Illustrated History & Guide to Its Spanish Churches* (Tucson: Arizona Pioneers' Historical Society). The Spanish-period missions of the Sonora River Valley are prominently featured in this book, which also describes both large and small settlements where the churches were, and are, located, with information on road conditions, accommodations, and the people for whom these places are home.

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Father Kieran McCarty, or “Kiro,” died in Tucson in December 2008 at the age of 83, still at home in his beloved Sonoran Desert.

The field diary refers briefly to conservationist Margaret Owings, Nat Owings’s wife. She and their daughter were heavily involved in efforts to preserve the balance of sea life on the California coast, especially the sea otters being threatened by overfishing of abalones on which otters depend for their survival. The Owings lived in a house, Sea Bird, overlooking the pounding surf at Big Sur, California. Their campaign was a successful one, and sea otter numbers rebounded.

In a very small way, the 1982 account published here is a further contribution to our understanding of this part of the Mexican state of Sonora, a snapshot in time to add to a continuum that has since brought new roads; paved highways; hotel and bed-and-breakfast accommodations with Wi-Fi; the legalization (with proper permits) of locally produced bacanora, a mescal distilled from agave plants; and other modern amenities. These are now touted on worldwide websites, in newspaper travel sections, and in magazines. One can only wonder what the next thirty years will bring.

FIELD DIARY

April 28, 1981 (Tuesday)

Warm, clear morning. Leave home at 7710 S. Mission Road, Tucson, Arizona, at 8:15 a.m. in our 1978 Volkswagen van. Nathaniel Alexander Owings, the “Owings” in the architectural firm of Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill, is a passenger. He flew into Tucson the day before and has spent the night with us in our home.

We drive to Mission San Xavier del Bac to pick up Father Kieran R. McCarty, O.F.M., who is a friend and a Spanish-speaking priest who will accompany us on the trip to Sonora.

Father Kieran is in the mission’s Bonaventure Oblasser Library when we arrive. Nat has a brief look at the library, and we drive from the mission down Interstate 19 toward Nogales. En route to Nogales we stop at the Food Giant grocery store in Rio Rico where we buy (Nat pays) soda pop, uncarbonated fruit drinks, a can of peanuts, and a bag of ice.

We cross into Nogales, Sonora, and quickly check through customs without any problems. Kieran gives a dollar to the man who stamps and checks our tourist permits; I give a dollar to the man who types out my car permit. Kieran then gives another dollar to the man who puts the Mexican tourist sticker in the windshield and rear window of the van. None of this tipping is required by Mexican law (in fact, I believe it is forbidden by law), but Kieran thinks—whether correctly or not—it speeds things along and is justified because of Mexico’s poor salaries for such official employees.

From the customs station we drive to a bank where Nat and Kieran buy pesos with American dollars. I convert three \$100 pesos notes to six \$50 pesos notes. I had already bought \$1,100.00 pesos in Tucson for \$46.00 dollars (which comes to \$23.90 pesos to the dollar).

Leaving the bank, we drive across the railroad tracks to the east and take a brief tour up the road next to El Arroyo Buenos Aires. It is up this road, among interesting dwellings and commercial establishments and near an orphanage, that Kieran and his Mexican wife, Antonia, own a home and some acreage in an idyllic setting among some beautiful shade trees. Although we take this tour, he does not tell Nat he is married (they were married in a civil ceremony in Mexico) and has a 14-year-old son (although I had told Nat earlier; and Nat never hints that he knows what is going on). The whole thing is like a silly game, as Kieran knows all too well.

From here we drive south on Mexico Highway 15 through the “twin plants” industrial area at the south side of Nogales and continue nonstop to Imuris. At Imuris we try without success in two places to buy a hat for Nat. His size 8 ! is just too big for standard Mexican hat sizes. We take time to visit the church at Imuris and for Nat to see the Black Christ figure in it.

We go to the Imuris bus stop, look at orchids in full bloom on the nearby orchid trees, and have *quesadillas* (small flour tortillas with locally-made goat cheese melted between them, sandwich-like), jalapeño chilis, and coffee in the bus depot’s tiny restaurant. Nat makes himself memorable to the waitresses by spilling two cups of coffee before we leave. But the lady waiting on us was very good-natured about it.

We head east to Cocospera, driving up the terrible road which takes us to a flat just below the summit of the terrace on which the mission rests. The caretaker’s house is located at this flat, just below the ruins of the church (the caretaker is in the employ of Mexico’s Instituto Nacional



Figure 1. Nat Owings (left) and Kieran McCarty at Cocospera.

Antropología e Historia; he lives in the house with a wife and one or more children under very primitive conditions, with a wood stove for cooking and no electricity). The road leading all the way to the very top of the terrace is blocked by rocks placed there to prevent vehicles from going all the way. This is done as a conservation measure to help protect the site.

No one is at the caretaker's place but a dog. One of the dog's dishes is a Volkswagen hubcap. Since one of my hubcaps is missing, I steal the



Figure 2. Nat Owings at Cocospera.

dog's hubcap, thinking I need it more than he does. Although it had the remains of dog food encrusted on both the outside and inside, I try it on my right rear wheel. It fits perfectly even though the style doesn't match that of the other three hubcaps. I didn't think the dog would mind. And if he did, he didn't say so.

We walk up to the ruins of Mission Nuestra Señora del Pilar y Santiago de Cocospera. We remove the brush barrier that has been placed at the entrance to the church to discourage people like us from entering the church. Nat is thrilled with the whole business. He thinks the church and the ruins are magnificent. He points out that the ribs on the scallop shell (or what is left of it) that once formed the container for the main altarpiece were cast out of plaster in molds made of fired roof tiles, some of which can still be seen.

The scallop ribs of the shell forming the upper portion of the portal were cast in the same way.

Nat would love the challenge of overseeing the restoration of Cocospera, and he intimated that he would devote his time and engineering and architectural talents free of charge. I take two black-and-white photographs here with my 35-mm Pentax camera (figures 1–2).

From Cocospera we drive to Cananea without stopping. En route we drive through some beautiful country and see some fine scenery, both

valleys and mountains. Most of this country is in the 4,500'–5,000' oak zone. At Cananea we fill the tank with gas, paying an incredibly small amount of money for it (regular gas). Then we take the newly paved highway southeast along the Rio Bacoachi to the old mission town of Bacoachi. The highway follows this easterly tributary of the Rio Sonora rather than the more westerly tributary of the Rio Bacanuche. The scenery is indescribably beautiful, especially a few miles north of Bacoachi when we parallel the river closely and as we pass through two small farming settlements.

We leave the paved highway to drive right into the town of Bacoachi. I had been here a few years previously with Alexander Russell Jr., Richard Felger, and Beatriz Braniff in Russell's airplane. We landed on the dirt road right next to the cemetery, having flown into town in a futile effort to buy a bottle of bacanora mescal, the home-brew, bootleg specialty of the area (it is a highly alcoholic drink distilled from local agaves). We had no luck at the time.

Nat, Kieran, and I visited the church, having to settle for an inspection of the outside since the doors were closed and locked. The plaza of the town, as is usual in Mexico, has the church on one side. I took a black-and-white photograph of Nat showing Mission San Miguel de Bacoachi in the background; Nat took a picture of me and Kieran standing behind the church, which shows the valley and mountains in the background (figure 3).



Figure 3. Bunny Fontana (left) and Kieran McCarty at Bacoachi.

We started to drive away from the plaza, and as we did so we saw a man using a roller brush to paint the side of a building on the plaza (bright blue). I suggested to Kieran that we ask him if he knows where we can get a bottle of bacanora—the distilled spirits of agave. The man, whose nickname turns out to be “Bronco,” misunderstood Kieran’s question and he dropped his paint roller and momentarily disappeared into a nearby doorway only to reappear moments later carrying a bottle which still had in it about four fingers of the clear, locally distilled firewater. Bronco thought we just wanted a snort. Nat, who is a recovered alcoholic and who does not drink liquor at all (including wine and beer), thought the whole thing was very funny.

When Kieran explains the misunderstanding, Bronco says he will take us somewhere where we can buy a whole bottle, but we have to agree to bring him back (he had almost as much paint on himself as on the wall, and I suspect he had been sampling the bacanora before we arrived). From the way he spoke, I thought we might have a long drive out into the countryside, but we agreed that we would indeed bring him back to the plaza.

He makes us wait a moment while he puts some finishing touches on the wall he is painting. He wipes off his hands on a cloth and climbs inside the van, sitting next to Nat on the middle seat. Off we go to get some bacanora, which the local people call “lechuguilla,” the name of the agave from which it is distilled.

Rather than pointing us out into the country, he directs us to a house no more than four blocks away. This is the home of his *parientes*, relatives. The lady of the house is a bit apprehensive about the purpose of our visit, knowing that to sell bacanora (like the sale of moonshine everywhere, since the state cannot tax it) is strictly illegal. In spite of her apprehensions, however, and with Bronco’s half-drunken assurances, she sends a child with a quart bottle to fetch the liquor.

While we wait, Nat remains outside in the van while Kieran and I remain in the kitchen of the house. A girl, perhaps 16 or 17 years old, sits at a table listening to music on a portable radio. It is presumably her mother who has sent the child off with the bottle to fill it at some mysterious place.

To put the woman at ease about the transaction taking place, Kieran tells her he is a priest from Mission San Xavier del Bac.

Bronco, as it turns out, has spent about seven years living and working in the United States. He can speak quite a bit of English, English more

than liberally sprinkled with “shit,” “goddam,” “fuck,” “Jesus Christ,” etc. etc. He was born in Bacoachi, however, and has been back here since 1976, 1977, or 1978 (I’m not sure which). He told us when he came back to Bacoachi, but I don’t recall exactly what year he gave. He also told us his real name. It is A[??] Serrano.

The child returns with the quart bottle filled with bacanora, and I end up paying the lady \$250 pesos, or about \$10.46 U.S. money. It is very expensive, but this is exceptionally fine liquor and, as Kieran observed, the family could no doubt use the money. They were anything but monetarily rich, their adobe house and furnishings being most humble.

We drove Bronco back to the plaza, said goodbye, and drove out of town onto the paved highway once more and headed south again. From Cananea to Bacoachi it had been 34.0 miles, all of it on a paved highway except in about three places where roadwork was still being done where the highway crossed arroyos.

We drove nonstop another 20.6 miles on the same paved highway until we came to Chinapa, the site of Mission Señor San Jose de Chinapa (figure 4).

We drove off the pavement to the east and headed into the plaza next to the church. A health clinic is just east of the church. The door of the former boasted a poster touting family planning.

We go inside the church. It is very simply furnished. Two women keep their eyes on us, and as we are about to leave they approach us and



Figure 4. The church of Señor San José de Chinapa.

offer to sell us an 1872 Mexican silver peso. We decline to buy it even without asking its price.

I take three black-and-white photographs of the church, one with Nat in the foreground and another showing Kieran and Nat walking by the side of the building (figure 5).



Figure 5. Kieran McCarty (left) and Nat Owings at Señor San José de Chinapa.

Leaving Chinapa, we drive south again, this time climbing and descending a steep but well-paved and well-engineered mountain road that takes us to Arizpe and the Mission Nuestra Señora de la Asunción.

It is 13.4 miles from Chinapa to Arizpe. Thus it is 68.0 miles from Cananea to Arizpe, which should be about an hour and a half's leisurely drive without stops.

It is about 5:00 to 5:30 p.m. when we arrive in Arizpe. We drive to the main town square—which is a block south of the church. It has a clock tower in its center; the city hall is on one of its sides (west). The streets around the square are temporarily torn up, with new sidewalks being put in as well as new brick-tiled pavement for the streets. These tiled streets will give Arizpe a “colonial” appearance, although in colonial times the streets were probably muddy or dusty in season.

We ask a man sitting in the plaza how to find the home of Carmen Pellot, and he directs us to a green-painted house immediately diagonally across the street from the 18th-century church to its southeast.

Carmen Pellot is a wealthy spinster who owns a ranch on the Rio Bacanuche. She is perhaps in her late 40s or early 50s. She is Arizpe's self-appointed historian and custodian of all things historical, including the church and other historic buildings in town. She regards herself as—and to a large extent has become in fact—the protector of the town's architectural and historical integrity. She has an acid tongue that wags incessantly, although she is in reality more often than not correct in her assertions regarding local history, architecture, and conservation.

While Kieran looks for Carmen, Nat and I go into the church since its huge front doors are open. We make a quick tour, admiring the two Baroque wooden altarpieces (retablos) in the side chapels, one of which (west) is dedicated to Our Lady of Loreto and the other of which is dedicated to Saint Ignatius of Loyola (east). We admire the high ceiling, beams and corbels, and the whole ensemble generally, though Nat reacts negatively to the present main altar setting: statues of ceramic material (or possibly even plastic) that are very modern, the whole with a light green painted backdrop in place of an altarpiece. There is a statue of Our Lady of the Assumption on a stand directly over the altar and tabernacle about halfway to the ceiling (a modern statue).

When we walk out of the church, we see Kieran on the street. He motions to us to come to Carmen's fine house. We visit in her home for about a half hour while she shows us copies of documents and photos of the church taken at various periods, including a lot of pictures of the most recent efforts by the Mexican government (under auspices of the Instituto Nacional Antropología e Historia) to restore it and/or stabilize it. All the while she goes on incessantly complaining about this recent work done on the church (still in progress, in fact). She has no confidence in the architect hired by the Mexican government to handle the job. She is convinced the whole church will collapse or, at the very least, the facade will fall away from the church in spite of steel rods and cables. The body of the church is of sun-dried and stuccoed adobe; the facade and bell tower are of fired brick.

She takes us over to the church and gets the key to the bell tower from the young resident priest to whom she introduces us. He is Father Espinoza. We go on a tour of the bell tower, and from the bell tower we go into the choir loft of the church while Mass is in progress. She has us stand by a crack in the front wall in the choir loft where one can feel the breeze blowing through.

We come down from the choir loft through the bell tower (the only way it can be done), and she takes us upstairs in the parish hall where

we see the stored remains of the original wood *retablo mayor*, or main altarpiece. It originally had Solomonic columns. There was (and is) also an enormous wooden crown. It is covered with gilt and is “stored,” i.e., lying on the second story floor of the parish hall.

From here we went back downstairs, Carmen complaining all the way about the restoration and the mistakes being made. She pointed out things being done wrong concerning drainage away from the roof, for example. And the nave of the church now gets sunlight from glass-brick windows that have been installed in the nave, possibly weakening the fabric of the walls.

We followed Carmen into the sacristy where we again saw the priest, services just having concluded. She showed us stored in the sacristy paintings and statues from the church’s colonial past, reciting the history of each piece. Then she led us to the apse and pointed out places in front of the old high altar where various priests were buried. Kieran later commented he had the impression she would like to be buried here too.

In the middle of the nave of the church there is a skeleton under glass in a coffin in a vault beneath the floor. These are the presumed remains of a Spanish colonel or lieutenant-colonel named Echeagaray.

This is according to Carmen Pellot. The sign by the grave, however, says these are the remains of Juan Bautista de Anza the younger, the man who in 1775–76 led colonists overland to Alta California, some of whom later became the founders of the city of San Francisco. According to Carmen, the burial register indicates clearly that Juan Bautista de Anza was buried in the chapel dedicated to Our Lady of Loreto. She is convinced that the exposed skeletal remains are actually those of Echeagaray. Kieran says the microfilms he made of the Arizpe burial registers do not show the disputed entry, but Carmen says that Father Antonio Magallanes, the former parish priest, had taken the telltale entry with him (a page out of the register?) to Agua Prieta.

I gather that the document has since been returned to Arizpe.

[It should be noted here that Father Magallanes was the resident priest at Arizpe when excavations were carried out inside the church in 1963 preliminary to installation of a new floor in the nave. Because people from San Francisco, California, had paid the bill for the work, a geologist, archaeologist, and physical anthropologist from the University of California at Berkeley were present when the digging commenced. When the uniformed officer was located in the nave of the church—either Anza or Echeagaray or someone else—Magallanes agreed that the remains were those of Anza. He may later have discovered the burial register

entry, but between the discovery of the burial on February 23 and his being honored in San Francisco on April 3, he decided to say nothing in an effort to save everyone embarrassment.

The story of the excavations, celebrations, etc. is told in the book by J. F. Bowman and R. F. Heizer, *Anza and the Northwest Frontier of New Spain* (Los Angeles: Southwest Museum Papers, no. 20 (1967).]

We leave the church, finally, with Nat telling Kieran that under no circumstances should he invite Carmen to come to dinner with us.

Her unceasing chatter has worn out his 78-year-old nerves.

Earlier, as we were headed to church with Carmen, she had sent a little girl to make reservations for us in what is apparently the town's only "hotel" (although there are obviously rooms for rent in other establishments). Since the hotel, which is right across the street from the church, boasts only four rooms, it was a good thing that Carmen sent the girl on the errand.

We took our leave of Carmen and checked into the hotel. Kieran and I share one room; Nat takes a room to himself. Each room has its own bathroom and shower; the place is very clean. The beds have foam rubber mattresses. There are two beds, a single and a double, in every room.

We barely get our suitcases unpacked and here comes Carmen carrying a bottle for us which has in it some three or four fingers of bacanora.

We thank her without telling her we had bought a full bottle in Bacoachi. She returned to her house as soon as she gave us the bottle.

The De Anza Restaurant is connected to the hotel and is under the same ownership or management. In fact, I guess the hotel is also the De Anza, although the sign above the west entry to the hotel just says "HOTEL." But one can also enter the hotel through the restaurant, which faces the street across the street from the priest's quarters adjacent to the mission's massive bell tower.

We have a fairly adequate supper at the restaurant: beef steak ranchero style. This means the beef is cooked well done (almost cremated, in fact) and cut into small chunks. Kieran and I enjoyed our supper; Nat thought the steak was terrible. I think he had his mind on a New York cut, T-bone, or something similar.

While we are in the restaurant I use the last picture of the day in black-and-white film to take a shot of a San Francisco, California, pennant hanging on the wall just above a plaster bas-relief casting of the head of Juan Bautista de Anza.

After dinner we walk around the corner to the town square where we buy chocolate ice cream cones in an ice cream shop that is still open.

Then we sit on the steps of the clock tower in the middle of the plaza and watch the boys and girls promenade in opposite directions around the square.

Carmen told Kieran that Arizpe had the clock in town for many, many years before someone finally thought it was important enough to get the clock to run. It has chimes that sound every 15 minutes or every half hour (I forget which).

Before 9:00 p.m. we walked back to our rooms where Nat retired for the night and where Kieran and I stayed awake “discussing” the fine bacanora Carmen had brought to us (to the last drop) as well as most of the bottle we had bought in Bacoachi. The Bacoachi bottle, to my taste, was too sweet. Kieran, however, detected no sweetness at all. Considering that this stuff has to be at least 120 proof, it’s a miracle we didn’t kill ourselves.

We both went to sleep some time after midnight. It had been quite a day.

April 29, 1981 (Wednesday)

We get up at 7:00 a.m., or, to be exact, we were up, dressed, and ready to go at 7:00 a.m. We had breakfast in the De Anza Restaurant.

I had hotcakes, fresh orange juice, coffee, and bacon. We paid our combined food and hotel bill, the whole thing coming to less than \$13.00 dollars U.S. money. After we pay we decide to leave our things in our rooms in case we want to return to use the bathrooms.

The bathroom in the room shared by Kieran and me had a peculiarity I have never seen elsewhere. The roll of toilet paper was on a holder fastened to the wall just above the toilet’s water tank and squarely centered over the tank. In other words, as one sat on the commode, the roll of toilet paper was directly behind one’s back. Only in Mexico!

I take my camera, and while Kieran goes off to talk with Carmen again and to have a tour of Arizpe’s many colonial historic sites, Nat and I climb the bell tower of the church to have a leisurely view of the surroundings.

Before that, however, Carmen shows us the Arizpe museum she has put together in the colonial-period *pagadoria* or paymaster’s office.

The building, which has undergone many later modifications and has been used for a variety of purposes over the years, is immediately adjacent to her house. It is filled with a wild variety of old objects, most of them

things picked up or collected from Arizpe and its immediate environs. One case held a picture on tin of Teresa Urrea, the turn-of-the-century Santa Teresa de Cabora [see William C. Holden, *Teresita* (Owings Mills, Maryland: Stemmer House, 1978)]. We took the picture outside so I could take a color picture of it. The same case that had her picture was filled with old patent medicine bottles, some still in their original packages. The museum also boasts fossils, minerals, pottery fragments (including majolica), arrowheads, horseshoes, firearms fragments, photos, etc., etc. Carmen knows the whole story of each and every object and is more than willing to share her vast knowledge.

While Kieran and Carmen take a tour in her car—which is a late model, large Ford—Nat and I spend time in the bell tower while I take pictures of the scenery around the town, including the river valley marking the town's eastern boundary. Earlier in the morning, I had finished off the roll of black-and-white film by taking exterior pictures of the church (figure 6) as well as photos of the retablos on the two side altars in the east and west transepts. I take a great many pictures in Arizpe, but most are on 35-mm color slides and I have not had them printed. Those that we printed are the exterior of the church, Nat Owings standing in front of the church, the main altar of the church from the choir loft, and a view looking south over the main plaza and clock tower. The clock indicates the time of day is 9:30 a.m.

The Rio Bacanuche (where Carmen owns a large ranch) and the Rio Bacoachi flow together just north of Arizpe to form the Rio Sonora, so it is the latter that I photograph. Before climbing down from the bell tower we go back inside the church where I take a color picture of the main altar from the choir loft.

We climb down from the bell tower and take a stroll around the town. It is a very pleasant place, a combination of fallen adobe walls and brand-new construction and everything in between.

Kieran and Carmen return just as the day starts to get rather warm (hot, actually), and we put our suitcases in the van and leave Arizpe at 10:25 a.m. headed south (odometer reading 54035.9 miles).

The highway following the river downstream, paved all the way to its junction with paved Highway 15, goes through spectacularly beautiful country just south of Arizpe, and I stop in two or three places to take pictures. There is quite a bit of water flowing in the river.

One of the advantages of this brand-new highway, in addition to its being paved and well laid out, is that it consistently takes one along the



Figure 6. The church of Nuestra Señora de la Asunción, Arizpe.

sides of the hills and mountains well above the stream. The old unpaved road often made its way right along the edge of the flood plain, whereas the new highway affords one spectacular, panoramic views.

The first mission town we come to this day is Nuestro Padre San Ignacio de Sinoquipe. We park by the village store and I take a few

pictures of church and town. I go inside the church to see what appears to be a colonial-period statue of San Ignacio on the main altar. The bell tower and about half the church are all that remain of the original structure. The church was once twice as long as it presently is and was connected to the bell tower. The missing narthex and portion of the nave are now a walk and garden. The footings of the original foundations, however, can still be seen.

Our next stop is Nuestra Señora de los Remedios de Banamichi, 27.1 miles south of Arizpe. Banamichi turns out to be a beautiful, flower-filled town. It is a fairly large town and boasts an enormous church. The church has a facade and bell tower that were added ca. 1964 by a priest who was an acquaintance of Father Kieran, a Father Encinas.

Part of the fabric of the present church is doubtless colonial period, but it had been unmercifully added onto over the years. It has an oddly shaped dome over the apse with four windows in the clerestory.

When we arrived, we couldn't get into the church because it was locked. We were about to leave when a pickup truck drove up. It turned out to be driven by Father José Durazo, the parish priest. Father Kieran had never met him before, but Father Durazo knew of Kieran by his reputation as a historian. Kieran also knew a great deal about the history of the Durazo family, which is one that had been in northwestern Mexico at least since the early part of the 19th century and possibly much earlier. Kieran says at least three or four brothers are priests.

Father Durazo took us into his study/office and showed us newspaper clippings of articles about the history of the church. Then he took us to the church and let us in, giving us a little tour. We stayed about fifteen minutes; then he drove away.

Off to the right of the church at Banamichi as one faces it, and marking the entry to the yard in front of the rectory and at the east side of the church, there is a stone-carved portal that once was probably the portal in the nave of the church itself. It is an arch with stone-carved columns on the side. This same kind of stone arch with designs carved into it is incorporated into the present triumphal arch of the standing church. They could very well be 17th-century originals. The Jesuits built the first church here in 1639; it was rebuilt in 1646; there were additions (or a new building) in the 1740s and 1760s (all this according to Paul Roca's book, *Paths of the Padres through Sonora*, p. 160).

I take several pictures here, including a series of photos of the stone arch on the outside showing its carved decorations. Just before we leave,

I also take a couple of pictures of plaques on the plaza in front of the church, one telling when potable water was brought to Banamichi.

We leave Banamichi about 1:00 p.m., driving south through an area where the valley of the Río Sonora becomes increasingly wide. From here all the way to Ures and on to Mexico's west coast Highway 15, the valley and its communities show all the signs of direct linkage to the urban "outside" world. The towns are more "developed," more electrified, and probably more televisioned. The highway has been paved this far north for many years, it appears, and trash lines the highway's shoulders. Even so, this remains rural Mexico: cattle, horses, and burros are everywhere. So are chickens and pigs and people on foot.

Driving 7.6 miles south of Banamichi, we arrive at the sleepy little town of San Lorenzo Huepac. The church and its bell tower front on the plaza (what else?) where two men lie stretched out on the lawn, snoozing in the pleasant afternoon warmth enjoying their siesta time. We try to get into the church, which is said to have the most elaborate corbeled ceiling in Sonora, but it is securely locked.

I take some pictures, as I have been doing on the whole trip, before we continue south another 5.9 miles to the delightfully beautiful town of San Pedro de Aconchi. Here the plaza is a veritable garden. It is surrounded by a white-painted cast iron fence. In the plaza and in the yards of homes around the plaza are profusions of scarlet, red, and purple bougainvillea vines in full bloom.

I photograph the twin-towered church, including a close-up picture of the Franciscan coat-of-arms on the facade. Once again we are frustrated by not being able to enter the church and are therefore unable to see the black crucifix Father Kieran has told us about and which is pictured in Paul Roca's book (p. 164).

We walk all the way around the church, which has a combination of fired brick and sun-dried adobe fabric. I take photos showing the nice brickwork on the exterior of what is probably the sacristy. Nat casts a critical eye on all the stuccoing and he comments on the new windows being placed in the nave of this and other churches we have seen. He agrees that the churches doubtless need more light, but he decries the destruction of the original fabric.

Some kind of repair work is also being done on the east bell tower; there is scaffolding around it. We see no workers, however.

There is a furniture factory and restaurant diagonally across the street from the church. We don't take time to have a close look at either. Neither do we eat any lunch.

Our next stop turned out to be the wrong one. About 7.5 miles south of Aconchi there is a sign by the road which says “Baviacora.” But I turned right at the sign which turned out to be too soon. I made a hard right off the pavement and drove down a road to a cemetery. On the flat below the cemetery are a couple of households as well as the ruins of an adobe building (which I photograph) which could very well once have been some kind of a church.

Still thinking this was Baviacora, I drove down a steep road across a dry arroyo and to a brick church under construction. I take a photo opposite this new church looking at the Sierra Aconchi. It’s incredibly beautiful here.

Kieran correctly concludes we have turned off too soon and we are not in Baviacora. We are in a *very* rural outpost of the town. So we drive back to the highway above the cemetery and continue for another half mile or so when we hit the real Baviacora. It is, for all practical purposes, a small city.

The mission church here is one with a minaret-like tower standing squarely in the center of the facade fronting the portal. It inspires Nat to say he has seen some bad architecture in his life, but that this was the worst he had ever seen. This thoroughly Moorish tower—almost a Moorish phallus—was added sometime after 1910 as indicated by the photos in Roca’s book (figure 7).

Next door to the mission structure on the right as one faces the front of the mission there is a brand-new cement and concrete church—an enormous edifice under construction. It is a nightmarish blend of a dozen kinds of architecture, none of them modern: Moorish, Byzantine, Gothic, and God-knows-what-else. It is a twin-towered horror, probably the pride of the community.

The old mission itself is undergoing some kind of restoration, and the entire interior is at the moment a workshop where new corbels are being carved out of wood.

Although a sign on the nave door of the mission (between the mission and the new church) said “no entry” in Spanish, Nat and Kieran shoved through the door and went in. They were immediately attacked by a snarling, barking cur whom the workers had allowed to take up residence in the apse. Nat and Kieran tripped the light fantastic to avoid being bitten by this rather small mutt. Happily, they succeeded in their efforts. Kieran caught Nat to keep him from falling. The workers laughed uproariously and Nat himself announced that the best policy in such circumstances always is to show no fear—which is precisely what he did not do.



Figure 7. The old (left) and new churches, La Purísima Concepción, Baviacora.

The dog was shooed away and we went inside to have a closer look at the gutted interior. This church has a dome over the apse almost identical to the dome over the apse at Banamichi. It was very dark inside, with no nave windows to admit light. I took one picture inside showing the side altar to the right.

We next went into the new church, which is a veritable cathedral in proportions. It is still under construction. We sat down in the nave and rested awhile.

I took some photos of the old church and the new, with one of the workers clowning on the pediment of the new church for the sake of my pictures. I waved to him and we got into the van and drove away.

The road between Baviacora and Ures passes through the little town of Mazacahui. It is here that another paved highway branches east to Moctezuma. We continue west toward San Miguel Arcangel de los Ures, however, along a highway that rises sharply above the south bank of the Sonora River. We stop at a high point where I take a picture looking back upstream toward Mazacahui.

We continue downriver to Ures, a large city (formerly a Pima village) situated in a very broad area of the Sonora River Valley. In fact, the only mountains or cliffs to be seen are in the remote distance.

The church here is a large one. It is open and we go in. There are

many statues in the church, some of them probably dating from the colonial period. In one case on the left side of the main nave is a set of life-size statues looking very much like store mannikins. These may be colonial period as well.

I take a few photos of the exterior of the church as well as one of the plaza. There is a set of flying buttresses against the principal nave of the church. There are two other naves in the church, which is laid out in the shape of a "T."

We drive to a gas station back out on the highway where I fill the tank with cheap Mexican regular (low-octane) gasoline (Nova). From the gas station we drive to Pesqueira Park at the west edge of town, a place where a priest who served in Ures for many years (several decades, in fact) told Kieran that the old Franciscan-period hospice had formerly been located. There is no sign of it any longer showing aboveground; to find it would be the job of an archaeologist.

From Ures we drive nonstop to Mexico Highway 15. We decide not to drive to Hermosillo, but go north to the inspection station at Benjamin Hill where we are summarily waved through. Then we go nonstop through Santa Ana to Santa Magdalena de Kino. We check into two rooms in the Motel de Kino and Nat telephones his wife, Margaret, in Big Sur, California. They talk for nearly a half hour while Kieran and I each have a beer in the motel bar.

The Owingses' conversation largely concerns James Watt, the new Secretary of the Interior. He has opened "sacred" areas of the California coast to offshore oil drilling, and Margaret Owings, whose campaign has been to save the sea otters, is on the warpath. Nat found out from her that a petition drive has been started to have the insensitive Watt removed from office and that a large number of lawsuits have been filed. Nat is on the Secretary of the Interior's Advisory Board, and he is furious about Watt. He says the man brims with Calvinist uptightness and with genuine hatred for the department he now heads and in which he served as an employee for seven years.

When Nat got off the phone with Margaret, he said of Watt: "That sonofabitch is trying to kill Margaret's sea otters!"

We put our things in our two rooms (Kieran and I again share a room) and walk to the plaza to have dinner at the Tecolote Restaurant. When we get to the plaza I take at least one picture of Nat and Kieran showing the mission in the background.

After dinner at the Tecolote, we stroll around the plaza by the church as well as around the commercial plaza a block away. Nat started his

stroll ahead of us, and by the time we catch up with him he has already bought an ice cream cone. Considering he can't speak a single word of Spanish, it's remarkable.

We walk over to the lighted burial place of Father Kino and Nat sees his bones. The church was lighted earlier in the evening, but by the time we start to walk the few blocks back to the motel, the lights are turned out. And earlier in the evening the plaza in front of the church was alive with kids roller-skating happily on the sidewalks.

It appears that the people of Magdalena have at long last adopted this plaza as their own.

It is a little after 9:00 p.m. when we retire. Kieran and I leave untouched (and undrunk) the small amount of bacanora remaining in our bottle.

April 30, 1981 (Thursday)

I wake up about 6:00 a.m. and shower, shave, and dress. A small helicopter parked in a lot next to the motel warms up and takes off about 6:30 a.m. Kieran and Nat get up and dress; we put all of our belongings into the van; we drive to the Tecolote about 7:05 a.m. for breakfast.

After breakfast we stroll around the plaza by the church once more, look at Father Kino again, and visit the church itself. Father Kieran tells the details of his involvement in the discovery of Kino's remains (he was the unpaid historian on the project).

We drive from the plaza to a gas station where I fill up on regular, then drive nonstop to San Ignacio. Señora Gallegos, the sacristana (Josefina Gallegos), opens the church for us so we can see the whole mission. Nat, 78 years old, bad eyes and all, makes his way up the mesquite caracol (spiral staircase) in the bell tower and out onto the roof.

Before leaving San Ignacio we pay a brief visit to Mrs. Gallegos's backyard, from which there is a beautiful view of the orange, quince, and pomegranate trees that make up her lush orchard. And we discuss plans for the coming week's SMRC (Southwestern Mission Research Center) mission tour.

Before we leave, Mrs. Gallegos points out the blooming *Datura* plant (deadly nightshade, jimsonweed), which she calls *toloache*, on the pediment of the mission. I take a telephoto photograph of it. I also take a picture of Nat and Kieran standing in front of the church.

We drive from San Ignacio across the dry riverbed and take the unpaved back road through Terrenate and La Mesa to Imuris. It is a very pretty route to Imuris, and the road is in good shape.

We don't stop in Imuris, but drive without stopping to Nogales where we cross the border quickly and with no problems.

From Nogales we drive to Mission Tumacacori National Monument.

Nick Bleser is not there because he and his wife, Roberta Stabel, are out gathering basketry materials for the Papago basket makers who will be demonstrating at the mission this season.

Nat, Kieran, and I watch the videotape production which features Kieran as one of the principal actors. Then we tour the church ruins and the fine museum before driving north a quarter mile or so to Wisdom's Cafe. We have a fine lunch at Wisdom's (I have a green chili burro), and Nat picks up the tab for all of us.

From Wisdom's we drive to Mission San Xavier del Bac. While we are in the mission library, Nat looks at his airplane ticket and discovers that his plane is due to leave at 4:15 p.m. instead of the 5:00 p.m. he had thought. So we hurriedly look at the main support mesquite beams (columns) in the convento wing in Father Celestine's and Kieran's rooms. There is a slight delay in the proceedings when Father Celestine, who is 75 years old and who has just had major surgery to take care of adhesions that had formed as a result of heart surgery, decides we must see his incision and new external plumbing.

We also hurry Nat into the sanctuary of the church so I can point out to him the hem of the robe going over the ephod, which is sculptured under the cornice. It alternates, according to the prescription found in Exodus, with silver bell and pomegranate.

From Mission San Xavier I drive Nat to 7710 S. Mission Road so he can pick up his coat. He signs the Fontanas' guest register. Then I drive him directly to Tucson International Airport, getting him there at least 40 minutes before his flight is scheduled to leave for Albuquerque. I drop him off at the main entrance to the airport, then drive back to 7710 S. Mission Road, stopping on the way to pick up an afternoon newspaper. When I get home, Hazel arrives almost at the same time. We both go to the mission for the 5:00 p.m. happy hour with Father Kieran, Father Celestine, Margie Youngo (the secretary), and Brother Edmund. While we are there there is a veritable cloudburst, a 0.38-inch storm, complete with plenty of lightning and thunder. It lasts about an hour. Earlier in the day, between Imuris and Nogales, Nat, Kieran, and I had driven through the same storm, but we had remained in it for no more than ten minutes.

All in all, it was a grand trip.

(Total distance traveled in three days: 478.2 miles.) ❖