

ROLLING DOWN EL GULFO BOULEVARD

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We have been told that there are big fish in the Gulf of Lower California and plenty of them, so big that two strong men can hardly haul one of them into the boat, and so plentiful that the Senator, who has something of a reputation for veracity in his home town, said "catching them ceases to be a sport." Furthermore, said the Senator, the climate of the Gulf Coast is balmy and the scenery entrancing, you will have a restful and delightful vacation, and the thrill of your life." Nobody can resist the Senator when he is so eloquent and persuasive, so we started.

The party consisted of ten souls, the Senator in person was the host, his guests were a certain "distinguished personage" - who, for the purpose of this narrative, may be called the Governor, the Engineer, the Business man, the Judge and the Professor. Then there was the Lieutenant who looked, talked and acted like a Mexican Army Officer even to his little mustache, he was the interpreter of the party; Frank, the best cook on earth, two mules and two able bodied seamen.

The start was made from San Diego, March 20, 1936. In the light of later events, the departure seems highly significant. The route led through the green fields and prosperous ranches of the Imperial and Yuma Valleys to San Luis, the Mexican Port of entry. Here the magic of the Senator's voice and his documents gained entry for the party without delay. Before us was El Gulfo Boulevard. The Senator explained that this was so named a few years ago when a certain Mexican patriot applied to Mexico City for a permit to operate a saloon in our distinguished Santa Clara. His application was returned with the statement that it would be necessary to designate the Street on which the saloon would be located. There being no streets in Santa Clara, he took it upon himself to name the seventy-two mile stretch from San Luis to Santa Clara, "The El Gulfo Boulevard", and located a saloon on the block farthest south. That man was a genius as there is only one house in seventy-two miles and no filling stations.

As the immortal Shakespear said "There is nothing in a name", the Boulevard hardly measured up to expectations, the Engineer was heard to make disparaging remarks about its alignment and surfacing, it meandered aimlessly across the Mexican desert, twisting around every sand hill, turning out for every clump of sage brush, and winding its way southward like a rattle snake we met in the road on the way back. This, and one little Jack Rabbit were the only signs of life in the seventy-two miles - save for a flock of turkey buzzards which followed the party hopefully for a few miles.





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The Boulevard is not as one might suppose, cement, asphalt or even gravel - it is plain, ungraded, deep rutted desert sand, turnouts - all a hazard, especially to southbound traffic for northbound traffic has the right-of-way and can keep in the ruts; the curves are bone breaking. After we had gone ten or twelve miles at breakneck speed for an hour, sliding, scraping, bouncing, twisting around, at thirty miles an hour, the tender feet of the party were sore inwardly and outwardly.

The scenery about which the Senator had been so enthusiastic, suddenly became more desolate, there is nothing to see but sand, the spirits of the guests already at low-ebb were not cheered appreciably by the sight of wrecked and abandoned cars along the roadside, and bones rusting in the sun.

The first view of Santa Clara would have been something of a shock had not the nerves of the visitors that were guests been deadened by seventy-two miles of the Boulevard. Some twenty-five or thirty huts were sprawled over the sand; the prevailing architectural motive is pre-Columbus - the most favored building material being dry goods boxes, and a single room about 8 x 10 is adequate for a family of ten, which in Mexico is considered a little short of race suicide. The water supply is a single shallow well; toilet facilities are unlimited and occasionally picturesque. One of the more affluent citizens has parked a broken-down Ford in back of his house, this supplies all the necessary conveniences, when other resources fail, the nearby sand dunes are inviting - there nature would receive you as its own.

The Club House, which the Senator had intimated would open its hospitable doors to receive us, was a canvass tent. In no time at all our superlative cook had set before us a meal which made the Boulevard and all its racking curves fade in the background. At this point entered the villain of this story who is half-Mexican and half-Indian and wholly American in his sense of humor. Said he - "do you hear the Corbina popping on the beach?" Straining our ears seaward, we did seem to hear something besides the waves. The Mexican claimed that if we would go out with him we could catch some of these fish with our hands or club them to death as they rubbed their itching noses against the beach. The Governor was all for it.

Taking a lantern we sallied forth, it was a long slily walk; some \$10.00 shoes were ruined and some aristocratic ankles were plastered with plebeian mud, the effervescence of the waves was beautiful, but the fish apparently were thumbing their noses at us 100 yards off shore instead of scratching them on the beach. The Governor remarked, "it looks very much to me as though I have been taken on a Marine snipe-hunt."

Later on in the presence of nine witnesses, the Governor made a pact with the Senator that he would build a mile of secondary highway in California for every pound of fish caught the next day.





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The wife of El de Garde, the Chief dignitary of the City, was sick of the Flu. The Business man had the everlasting gratitude of the Mayor for loaning the Ford to go to San Luis for a nurse. The Senator, however, almost nullified the whole proceedings by giving the sick woman some pills which made her a well woman the next morning.

Sleep comes eventually to all who do not lie awake thinking of their sins, so all slept in time but the Professor. After the second night it was discovered that his sleeping bag might have been more comfortable if he had not forgotten to blow up the air mattress. With the approach of dawn, the snoring battalion ceased firing and all patriots fortified themselves with nourishment, solid and liquid, for a big day ahead. This was a day when, according to the Senator, we would drift dreamily over the waters of the Gulf, basking in the balmy tropical breezes and catching 200 lb. fish until satiated.

The boys were in the good ship "SUNTAN", a 65 ft. motor boat as broad in the beam as a Mexican Senora, the Captain and mates were full blooded Yaqui Indians.

Sure enough the Gulf was as placid as a lake, we chugged about eight miles down the coast, coming out of the muddy waters of the Colorado into the clear waters of the Gulf. The Captain searched the horizon for the unfailing sign of fish --- sea fowls, twirling above the water, up and down plunging head long after a luckless sardine, he knew where they were, there was a school of sardines and the Corbinas would gather to feed on them, and there also was the Totuava to feed on the Corbina in the dog-eat-dog way of the sea. The telltale sign would appeal.

The problem of bait was solved simply enough - first the mate caught a five lb. Corbina with a strip of dried fish belly saved from some previous expedition. The belly of this fish was used to bait a number of hooks - the fish caught on these were in turn used to lure their school mates to destruction. The Business man claimed that he caught a Corbina on a bear hook but nobody believed him. The Governor pulled in several 10 pounders and looked quite proud and happy. Soon the stern of the boat was covered with 5 lb. to 10 lb. Sea Trout.

This was good sport but where were those leviathans of the deep, the 200 lb. Totuavas that the Senator had assured us would almost jump into the boat? The Captain chased hither and yon over the sea, following every flock of gulls in sight but without avail. Disappointment, a chill in the air, the sun went under a cloud, the cloud belched forth rain, the westwind freshened to a gale, the sea began to show its teeth, the boat walloped weakly in the heavy swells, countenances that but





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an hour ago had been ruddy and sparkling with good spirits were now a sickly pale green, conversation slackened and died away - each man seemed drawn in spirit, the Governor was heard to remark "if we keep on chasing these Sea Gulls, pretty soon we will be down to Panama".

About this time somebody caught two Totuavas, one of 100 lbs. and the other 150 lbs., who actually pulled them in remains a mystery for by now all the party had reached the state of mind where even the sight of these two great fish made no impression on them. Perhaps we had better leave the matter rest in this way --- they were caught by the entire party in collaboration.

By general agreement, the boat then turned back toward Santa Clara, the lunch hour had come and gone but the delicacies prepared by the steward tempted few appetites. By this time most of the party were more anxious to exclude food than to imbibe it. The Senator recommended to the Governor that he eat an orange so as to stay his stomach. This proved to be poor counsel; the Business man and his son leaned over the rail together in friendly competition as to who could shoot the farthest - the old man won. Viewing this from afar, the Senator remarked unfeelingly, "is it not beautiful, is it not touching, a regular father and son banquet."

In his official capacity as Chief of the Expedition, the Senator then conferred on the son the degree of "AP" which he explained stands for "Amateur Puker", and on father the Post Graduate degree of "MP" - which stands for "Master Puker." With a commendable show of spirit, the Business man called his tormentor "Senator Bilge Water" - this title ought to stick.

The boat rolled on toward Santa Clara, the white caps showed more and more ominously against the darkened skies. Seated flat on their buttocks in the stern, the Senator, the Professor and the Engineer viewed the course of events with interest. The Professor hung grimly on the rope to keep from being washed over-board, and the Senator hung on to him. Every now and then a big wave would sluice over the boat from the windward side and drain off to leeward. For some reason or other, the trio continued to sit even though drenched, perhaps they were afraid if they stood up it would rock the boat. An unusually high comber drenched the Engineer, but he kept on talking. The Governor suggested that if the two big fish were dragged over to the windward side of the boat, it might help to trim the boat. This was done and it helped a lot.

About half-way to Santa Clara the engine caught, grunted and stopped, the pump had ceased to pump and the water had risen in the engine room, anchor out, and a mile from shore. The ship rolled while all hands bailed and pumped. The prospects were drear indeed, night





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was fast approaching, at any moment the anchor might drag and the ship be dashed to pieces on the shore. This fate, however, seemed preferable to a night at sea.

The Governor arose to the occasion - "how much is this boat worth he asked the Captain?" "Two thousand dollars" responded the Captain. Turning to the Senator, the Governor said "Senator if you will put up \$1,000, I will match it, we will buy this boat right now, haul up the anchor and take our chances in the breakers. The transaction might have gone through on the spot had not the engine turned over at this juncture and the boat again headed toward Santa Clara.

Eventually the "SUNIAN" dropped anchor off Santa Clara amidst rejoicing. The next problem was to get ashore and we were 1/4 of a mile out. The Business man's son and second mate took their lives in their hand, so to speak, in making the trip ashore in the dory. The tide which is 18 ft. in these parts was running out at the rate of five miles an hour, so they made slow headway and landed a 1/4 of a mile down the beach. Presently, three sturdy seamen came afterwards in a 20 ft. dugout made of a single log of mahogany. We had to wade the last few yards but nobody minded that - terra firma, although a bit cozy, seemed like the Rock of Ages, the village of Santa Clara looked as good to us as the city of Los Angeles, and the flapping old tent had all the charm and comforts of the Palace Hotel in San Francisco.

The Governor was keen to start for Los Angeles right away but none of the party more experienced in the ways of the desert, were anxious to do so and dissuaded him. To bed again but not necessarily to sleep, the wind howled through the tent, threw open the flaps and covered everybody and everything with sand. In the morning every ear was full of it, every mouth was gritty with it, and every bearded face was gray with it. Nobody even made a pretense of washing. Some drank cups of coffee to wash the sand down their gullets, others preferred beer or coca-cola --- it's all a matter of taste anyhow. The wind blew the Professor's socks right off his feet just as he was about to put on his shoes.

The return trip on Sunday was as "unusual", as the Senator put it, as it was the day before. Camp was broken, the cars loaded, the fish cleaned and iced, and the party got under-way at 7:50 but not with any great speed for progress is slow in a desert sandstorm when the winds swirl fifty miles an hour carrying with it sheets of sand, sand that stings the face, blinds the eyes, fills the wheel tracks, scars the finish of automobiles and raises h--- generally.

The Ford truck was sent ahead to break out the tracks and did a better job than did Henry's "peace-ship" in the World War. Clipping up the bluff from the Gulf shore, we ran into trouble in the form of two Mexicans driving a pre-historic car. They were stuck in the sand and as we were forced to stand in back of them - then it became a question of endurance, all the parties pushed and pulled one





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car at a time on pieces of tin or canvass so as to get traction for 20 feet more progress up the hill before the sand again smothered the tires. We got the Mexicans out and they showed their gratitude by sailing by us a little later when we were stuck again.

Surveying this scene through redened eyes, the Judge, who had thus far gone on with judicial serenity, handed down from the Bench his decision - "who is ----- was responsible for discovering this country anyhow, and why in ----- did they do it?" This decision was no doubt handed down through posterity.

Eventually the welcome sight of San Luis appeared through the sand clouds, and then we were rolling happily along on the paved roads of the good old U.S.A. What a contrast! Nature has been equally kind on both sides of the Line --- the same sunshine, the same rainfall, the same soil, the same opportunities for development. On one side of the Line, however, is desolation, ignorance, and roads that are merely traced. On the other side, a prosperous farming country, comfortable homes, educated people, great irrigation districts, and highways that lull the traveller to sleep even at 70 miles an hour.

It is fine to go down into Mexico once in a while, you will come back a more loyal American.

The Senator had promised us a trip that would be "different" than any we had ever taken - it was, it will linger in memory a life time - we can forgive him for the comparative dearth of big fish because of the thrills in other respects - all of which he probably had ordered in advance. The only question still at issue is - whether the Governor will make good on his pact, which was properly witnessed, to build as many miles of secondary highway as the number of pounds of fish caught on this trip. This number has been roughly estimated at between 500 to 5000 miles. The Judge ruled that an agreement made in Mexico is not necessarily binding in the United States, but we think the Governor will make good - he is a good sport.





OFFICIAL ANGLERS TELL OF BIG ONES MISSED IN MEXICO

After a totuava fishing trip in the Gulf of California as guests of State Sen. Ed Fletcher, state officials including Lt. Gov. George J. Hatfield were back in San Diego yesterday spinning yarns about "the big one they missed." The party, traveling in four trucks and autos and carrying their own water, food and other supplies, left Friday morning and were joined at El Centro by Hatfield and George Stout, California liquor administrator, who flew from San Francisco.

Also in the party were Ralph Seeley; Merle Templeton, state liquor administrator here; State Sen. Leonard J. Difani; State Sen. Ben Hulse; J. S. Oswalt, El Centro chief of police; Charles Fletcher, Charles Smith and State Sen. Sanborn Young. The party drove to Yuma and then went south through Sonora to Santa Clara.

The party caught 81 totuava, the largest of which weighed 162 pounds and was caught by Hatfield. The smallest fish caught weighed 50 pounds.

Hatfield was warm in praising the outing. He said: "The trip to the gulf is the most unusual on the North American continent. George Stout and myself left San Francisco by plane at 3:30 a. m. Friday and four hours later joined the party at El Centro. At 5 p. m. the same day we were at Santa Clara, on the gulf, a most remarkable change.

"I have seen nothing that approaches the peculiarities of the delta of the Colorado. The primitive life is picturesque and most interesting. The courtesy and friendliness of the Mexicans was outstanding and the delight of the trip is something that always will be remembered."

The party brought five of the fish back to San Diego. One of them which weighed more than 100 pounds was given to the Children's Home.

LT. GOV. HATFIELD IN FISHING PARTY



Lt. Gov. George Hatfield and other state officials have returned to San Diego from the Gulf of California, where they went totuava fishing as guests of State Sen. Ed Fletcher. Top (left to right): Ralph Seeley, Merle Templeton, Hatfield, Sen. Fletcher, State Sen. Leonard J. Difani, State Sen. Ben Hulse, George Stout, J. S. Oswalt, Charles Fletcher, Charles Smith and State Sen. Sanborn Young. Below: (left) Lt. Gov. Hatfield with a big catch and (right) Merle Templeton, state liquor administrator here, with a totuava he hooked.

Ed Fletcher Papers

1870-1955

MSS.81

Box: 74 Folder: 8

Personal Memorabilia - "Rolling Down El Golfo Boulevard"



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