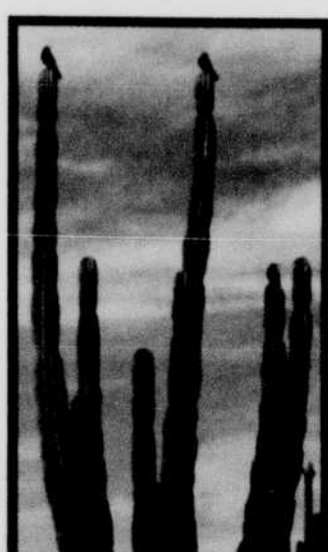
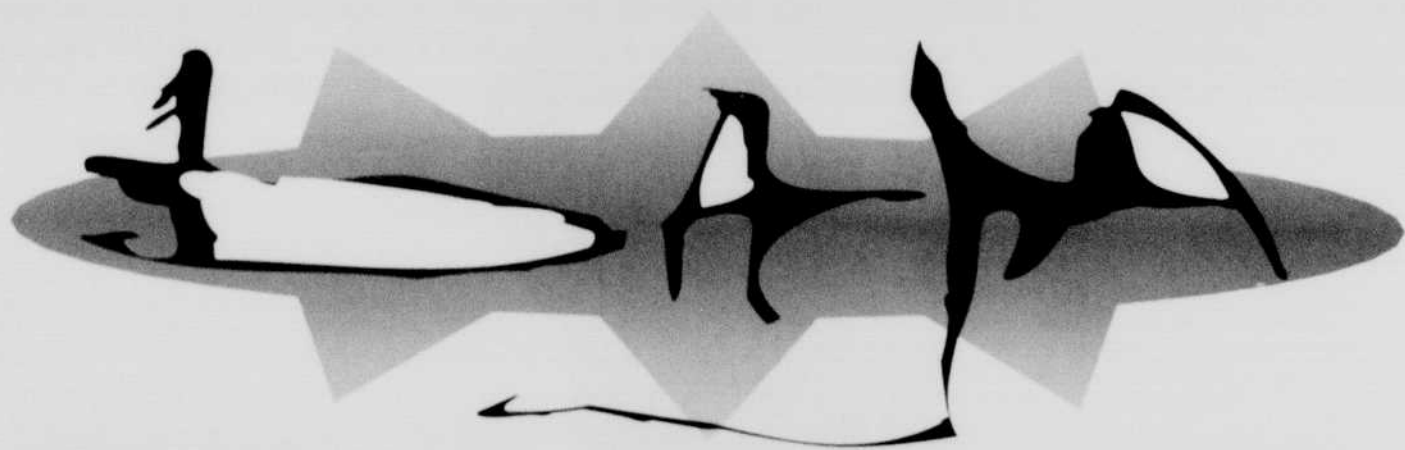




Jon Lowden

For nine long days I dwelt in a delicious void, covered with grime, baked by the sun, and untouched by the American Way.

While El Norte rumbled with the collective neuroses of some 300 million citizens — a child vanishes from a shopping mall, an unhappy Coloradan rakes the

White House with rifle fire, a commuter plane makes a gruesome final landing in an Indiana cornfield — I grunted up a hill on a mountain bike — in Baja California, focused on issues way more immediate than gun control or wing de-icing. Do I have enough water? Will the next town have cold beer? Where in the hell is Jose? When in Baja,

noticed. America seems a very long way away.

A mountainous and arid spit of land on the Pacific that runs south from the U.S. border at San Ysidro for about 760 miles. Baja California is made up of two Mexican states (don't let the "California" suffix fool you) separated from mainland Mexico by the Gulf

of California. Though most points in Baja are no more than a two-day drive from San Diego, in many respects this chile-pepper-shaped peninsula is a world unto itself.

There's really not much to do in Baja, unless you like to fish, hike, sit in the sun and read, ride mountain bikes, surf, sea kayak, sail, or drink beer.

I had plenty to do in Baja.

I went down to the sea and the

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