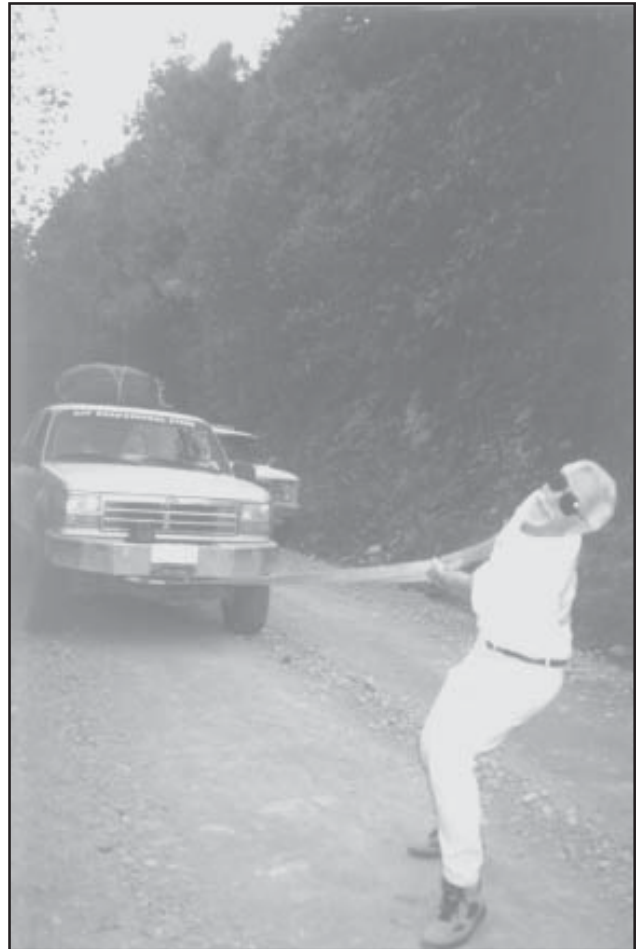


BURY MY FORD AT CEROCAHUI

This story chronicles the rescue of my Explorer from mid-Copper Canyon, Mexico ... and more. It's contains renditions of The Coyote's World. My philosophy is blatantly rubbed in your face, but I trust you know I care. It's also a version of the FOURWHEELING ACADEMY. However, the driving insights and navigation techniques are more subtly presented. I also learned a lot from the experience. I want to share that with you too.

No measurable amount of acknowledgment, gratitude and appreciation can be expressed by me to Steve Kawaratani for loaning me his Bronco to make the liberation possible. When first asked, there was not so much as a microsecond of indecision. "Yes," came without hesitation. Thank you, Steve, for your generosity and trust.

To assist tracking this adventure, follow along on your American Automobile Association (AAA) map. Use the coordinates (alpha-number) to locate the places.



Handle it, Coyote.

Photo by Cindy Obenski

By Harry Lewellyn

Bury my Ford at *Cerocahui* (G-8)? Not on your life! However, about midway through this vehicle rescue, I did wonder who would bury whom.

This is not the report on the November Copper Canyon (G-9, look for *Parque Natural Barranca del Cobre*) adventure. You'll see that in a month or so. This is a report on, "Harry, what do you do if something goes wrong?" In general, I'm annoyed by that question, totally understand from where it comes and completely empathize with those who ask.

When asked what do I do if something goes wrong, I sarcastically, smugly and confidently answer, "I'll handle it." "But what if something really goes wrong?" the query continues. "I'll handle it!" I maintain. "But what if you can't handle it?" persists the worrier. "The only things I can't handle are if I'm dead or unconscious," I insist.

I believe subconsciously driven debilitating thinking drives the belief that I, you, we can't handle everything. I'd like to bestow my philosophy and confidence on "handling it," build yours and offer this recent experience as confirmation of my methods and thinking.

I suspect everyone can handle everything, it just taxes our personal flexibility, creativity, patience and sometimes requires we deviate from the norm. It's a matter of moving through the unknown, a step at a time, with ceaseless confidence that the problem can and will be resolved. To a large degree, our limitations come from wanting to handle it immediately, perfectly, at no cost and with no change in the program. That's ridiculous! Even a flat tire takes time, costs money and changes the plan. Here's my report about rescuing my Explorer from Copper Canyon.

Descend a mile in 11 and you've got an average downgrade of about nine percent. Doug Rhodes, owner of the *Paraiso del Oso* Hotel near Cerocahui, says the one-lane trail from Baskets are Us (my name for the local cave dwelling basket-maker overlooking the *Urique* River) to the pueblo of Urique (G-9, find *Rio Urique*), has a slope or two in excess of 12 percent. For the plunge down, I remind my travelers of their often forgotten sheet metal brake. Bash the wall en lieu of a vertical tailspin over the side.

The trip up typically presents no problem, however, my Explorer did seem a little sluggish on the hairpins last November. Rationalizing it was only the altitude, I continued until my nose, eyes and eventually no

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movement smacked me with reality. The smoky fire from beneath was quickly extinguished and the trail of oil behind told me the auto trans had spent far too much time in Mexico. It had adopted burro-like qualities and refused to move. Handle it, Coyote!

The Star Fleet prime directive is to keep everyone safely moving together. Cindy and Ken Obenski's one ton 4WD Chevy van (Big Mama) had towed me into *Guerrero Negro* (F-3, first trans problem) on the February whale watch trip, so why not in Copper Canyon? Hey, my motor ran, so I still had power steering and power brakes. A tow seemed practical. As we moved out for Doug's hotel, I tallied my options. Here's just a sampling of my thinking!

Wishful thinking: I'd add fluid and it would run fine after it cooled off. No luck, turkey! After spending half a day rounding up 10 quarts of automatic transmission fluid (ATF), the limping leaker poured forth the answer. I couldn't carry enough ATF to make it to civilization at *Alamos* (G-7/8). Plus, what if it caught fire again and I couldn't put it out?

Ridiculous: Scratch the tour, send everyone off on their own and I'd deal with my problem. That's just not my style, plus it's definitely bad for business!

Swap it: Remove the auto trans and replace it with a manual. I've done a lot of transplants and that's not the kind of thing I wanted to handle in Mexico. Doug's place is remote. It has limited electricity, no phone and he even gets his drinking water from the Mennonite town of *Cuauhtemoc* (F-9/10) a 150 miles off.

Abandon it: Leave my girlfriend with the Explorer to get repaired and I'd continue to lead the tour. I know the Mexican family in *Ciudad Obregon* (G-6/7) that owns all five Ford dealerships and they send my type trans out for repair! Who could do it in the middle of nowhere? Too iffy! Besides, I've got warranty coverage and I'd definitely miss Jenna too much!

Tow to Alamos: Out of the question. The longest, roughest and most remote legs of our journey were still ahead. Even with Big Mama and Big Papa (Harold Peterson's Suburban) taking turns towing, we'd most certainly create another problem with one of them.

R, R & R #1: Remove the trans, haul it back to the US, repair it, transport it back

to Mexico and replace it. This may void the warranty, importing the bad trans back into the US would incur duty and getting the good trans back into Mexico would most likely be complicated with commercial import paperwork too.

R, R & R #2: Return to the US, pick up a rebuilt trans, return to Mexico, replace it and haul the defunct unit back to the US. Same problems as #1.

L, R & R: Leave the Explorer at Doug's, return at the end of the trip, then reevaluate my options. This lead to more alternatives.

T & T: Train the sick puppy out to the coast, then tow it back to the US. With three or four days advanced notice and a 10,000 kilo minimum, at N\$3,000 (new pesos), a flat bed train car could be waiting when I returned. I guess I could handle the cost, but I wasn't not sure I wanted to live in my car, on the tracks, for however long it would take to get out to *Los Mochis* (H/I-7/8). Unattended, I stood a chance of picking up a stripped shell. Further, there was a rumor the railroad was going on strike in December.

Brute force: Borrow a truck, return, tough it out to pavement, then tow it back to Tucson (B-6) for associate-dealer warranty repair.

Masochistic: Brute force it all the way back to California. How did I *handle it*?

Via the Cerocahui town phone, then carrier to Hotel Paraiso del Oso, I got a message to Doug to immediately reserve a flat bed train car. This would leave the tough, dirt road portion to the train and put nothing but interstate-quality toll road between my sickie and the states.

In the meantime, state-side, I wrestled with getting a tow bar and tow vehicle. My list of 4X candidates was as long as my arm. After all, who's going to loan me their pride and joy for a 2,000 mile journey into a foreign country, half of which would be towing a 4,000 pound load, including 100 miles on remote Mexican dirt?

With no substantial rental available, Pep Boys came through with a 5,000 pound-rated tow bar and number one on the car candidate list said, "Yes!" This added a new perspective.

Steve Kawaratani's Bronco is trick! A Rancho lift, 35 inch tires, 4:11 gears and ARBs at both ends, Readyair compressor plus engine mods, extra gas tanks and more definitely put the big black brute in the most capable category! And since

the Pep Boys tow bar would mount directly to my reinforced Superwinch bumper via four half-inch bolts, I had no doubt the combination would be tougher than nails for any trail. Let's cancel the train and take on the masochistic approach. We left a message for Doug at the Cerocahui town phone to cancel the train car.

Handling it does not mean making a plan and invariably holding to it. Changing the plan is a practical and legitimate option in handling it.

Steve had done Copper Canyon in 1994, so he knew well what his Bronco was in for. He had been the "sweep" on that journey and had affectionately re-named the slow, trailing position to "push." Now, his Bronco was going to be the "pull," which was nothing new to him. Just the week before, he had used it to tow in his disabled dump truck! He owns the Laguna (Beach) Nursery on Pacific Coast Highway.

The plan was to cross at Nogales, Arizona (C-6), take the Mex 15 toll road south to *Hermosillo* (E-6) and spend the night. The next day, we'd explore the paved two-lane Mex 16 east to *Basaseachic* (F-8, find *Parque Nacional Cascada de Basaseachic*), use the familiar two-lane dirt road to *San Juanito* (F-9), then follow my normal tour route through *Creel* (F/G-9), *Divisadero* (F/G-8/9) and check in with Doug at Paraiso del Oso the second day. Traveling without a caravan, I should have been able to put that behind me in two days. What could have been easier?

The November tour group enthusiastically supported the decision to leave my Explorer at Doug's. My top rack fit perfectly on Jay and Gail Gladinus' Explorer. Massive Big Mama accommodated all the rest of our gear and Jenna. I lead from the shotgun seat in Al Walter's '69 Scout. The only change was we were less one 4X. Again, words are not enough to express Jenna and my indebtedness and thanks to every member of the understanding group. There was no hint of discontent!

Jenna and I finished the regular tour with ten satisfied customers on November 26 and headed back to Mexico with the arrival of the first southern California El Niño storm on November 29. I felt at home in the Bronco, but 35 MPH in the rain definitely made progress a bit boring! OK, we made it to Hermosillo a little later than I had expected, so we wouldn't be able to prerun the Mex 16 approach. To

adjust, we planned for an early start the next morning.

Mex 16 was new to me, so with perfectly clear directions from the desk clerk at our motel, we fueled up at the Pemex. "What do you mean the regular unleaded pump is bad and I'll have to fill up with premium unleaded?" I muttered. N\$500 for half a tank and three GI cans seemed a little high. However, the attendant was nice and patient with his instructions to Mex 16. I ignored the fact that they differed slightly from the desk clerk's.

"Look," I told Jenna, "there's the prison and the sign that shows *Chihuahua* City (F-10) to the left just like the clerk had told us. And that is clearly a Mex 16 federal highway sign on the right side of the road. I think the gas station guy was confused with whatever he said about a *La Colorada* (E-6). Besides, we'll stop and ask at a *rancho* in a couple of miles."

This must be the only stretch of road in Mexico without a *rancho*, *desponchado* or cafe every kilometer or two. "There must be one just over the next hill," I dreamed. We continued even though the sun was gleaming through Jenna's side window. This told me the road had taken an undesired northerly bend. "Hey, there's a road sign coming up," I announced with delight. "What's that? It reads Son. 104 (Sonora state highway). Let's check the map on the fly."

Sure enough, there were two somewhat parallel roads headed our desired direction. Jenna then made an encouraging observation. About 40 kilometers ahead there was a 60 kilometer dirt crossover that would put us back on Mex 16. At the current speed, I crunched a few numbers and figured that crossover would only add about 45 minutes to an hour to our misdirection. Bad news, it started to rain and the fog got thicker and thicker. I had to slow way down. I hated to see the K-post markers going by so slowly! I wondered if the Mexicans knew something I didn't. I hadn't seen but one car since we left Hermosillo an hour before. Well, for sure, we would eventually hit *Mazatán* (E-6/7) and they would set us straight.

"Hey, there is even a Pemex in Mazatán. Let's ask there," I suggested. "What do you mean there's no way over to Mex 16 other than back to Hermosillo?" I exclaim! Even if the map was wrong, I still didn't like that answer! "Let's ask someone else at the fruit stand just ahead," Jenna urged. Fortunately, they knew of

the short cut through *Soyopa* (E/F-7) and they encouraged us to move on.

Now, I've spent a lot of time on a lot of Mexican dirt roads and I know the maps leave more than a little to be desired regarding these easy looking shortcuts! I just hoped we could find the initial turn off! With a clearing sky, we successfully completed our right onto the dirt and with the sun on my side, I felt things, and our direction, had definitely made a turn for the better.

As we approached Soyopa, off in the distance, I could see 10 or 15 Mexicans and a white pickup truck in the middle of a stream. "#*%@, I wonder, how much time my help others ethic is going to cost me this go around!" I cried out. But by the time we made water, the Mexicans were clear and directing me through the shallow track. What a relief, besides, the rain sure kept the dust down.

Next, came a fair-sized unmapped *pueblo*. "There must be at least 10 buildings ahead," I observed. With a simple question or two answered by the locals, we were back on path until we reached an unmapped Y. Yikes, "How about right?" That seemed headed a little more south than the other branch.

Moments later, double yikes! "Honest Jenna, I want to help that horny thing wedged in the cattle guard as much as you do, but he just doesn't seem too receptive to my offer of assistance," I exclaimed! We moved through the gate with a moral commitment to tell the first *vaquero* we saw of the distressed bull. "Man, I hope that's soon," I pleaded!

A couple of more lucky Y decisions made me glad we were on the high road. We'd never have gotten across that raging river below. About that time, we found a *vaquero* and reported the trapped *toro*. To our delight, he informed us that pavement was nearing. How about that, they did make more Mex 16 highway signs than the one I had seen more than two hours ago. As best I could tell, in just an inch or so (on the map), we should be at the San Juanito turn off. Nothing could slow us down now!

Oops, those roads were a little steeper, tighter and slipperier than I had expected. That overturned semi looked like it had slipped off the road in the rain last night. I saw that the passengers of a trapped bus had started a lunch fire. "Let's scout it on foot and see if there's a way around," I encouraged. In the meanwhile, they

lowered the winch cable and flagged us around the disabled monster.

The trek to the San Juanito turnoff seemed to take forever. Along the way, I took full advantage of the Tecate-can strewn road. My tire placement proficiency with the unfamiliar Bronco was improving with every red target hit. This useful skill would prove critical on the rough trip out. By the time we got to Creel, we knew we'd never make Cerocahui before sunset.

"Good morning, Mexico!" exclaimed this enthusiastic, Bronc-bustin' pair. We had never driven to Divisadero in the before light! Just outside of *San Rafael* (between Divisadero and Bahuichivo), we took a right at what I call the blue cross intersection, which is now painted white. I wanted to try the improved, high road to Bahuichivo. I usually take a left and use a scenic alternative through the depths of a picturesque little canyon. If you've done the trip with me, it's where we stop for photos at the Cave of the Dragons.

I'm proud of my navigational skills and continue to be amazed at what is left to learn. As we topped what appeared to be the last summit before starting a significant descent, I told Jenna the cloud-covered valley below could be Bahuichivo. That little peak to the southeast looked like my Bahuichivo marker, but I'd never seen it from this perspective before. We plunged down into the clouds and, sure enough, we were through Bahuichivo in no time. Good one, Coyote!

Still sailing along in the fog and an unfamiliar time of day, I was amazed as I whizzed past the Paraiso del Oso gate. Bad one, Coyote, but do take note that time of day and conditions can change your perspective. The right out of San Rafael had paid off. Doug was disappointed we were a day late, but surprised at our 9 a.m. arrival from Creel.

About the time we hit the driveway, I mentioned to Jenna we'd be lucky to get headed back by noon tomorrow. She remarked, "You've got all day to ready the Explorer. I can't believe drilling just four holes will take more time than that. You're the Coyote. What can go wrong?" In the mean time, Doug advised he had not received the train-cancel message until Saturday and found no one on duty at the train station. If the flat car was on the

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siding, I'd be on the hook to pay! This brought up another possibility and problem.

Combo masochistic: Since both the Bronco and Explorer were under the 10,000 kilo minimum, we could train both out to the coast, then head for California. However, I hadn't brought enough money to pay for the train. Doug would have taken my check, but he told me he was low on cash, too. How am I going to pay for the train? Handle it, Coyote!

A legitimate option for handling it is don't. Do I really know I have to pay for the train? Why spend energy solving a problem that may not exist? I'll handle the money problem when and if it comes up! Move on, Coyote!

Doug was supposed to have been on an eight-day pack trip, but fortunately for me, his client had found the language barrier and terrain a little more than she had expected. In the mean time, he had sent one of his hands, Gilbert, out with the lady to put her on a plane home. After two hours of searching for the rail road station master, and walking the tracks looking for my flat bed, which we didn't find, we learned Gilbert had seen Raoul upon his departure. He had canceled my flatbed. Hooray, no money worries! It was time to get back to the tow bar mounting task.

With confidence and dispatch, I proceed to meticulously measure, locate, center punch, smash one finger and drill four pilot holes. Two batteries and one and a half, ½" holes later, my rechargeable drill had died. I needed four holes! No problem, Doug had a generator and a AC drill. "Fire her up!" I instructed.

Smoking and stinking, the overused and abused AC unit gave up just half a hole short of my four hole goal. Doug again came to the rescue with a rechargeable and ran his battery dead on the last part of the last hole. Jenna's right, maybe we'll be out of here bright and early *mañana*. "Let's bolt her up and see how she fits," was my order.

"Jenna, bolt on the tow bar brackets and I'll disconnect the drive shaft," I commanded, "then I'll pin the puppy in." Nooo! Yes! N o o o! Y e e s s! Obviously Pep Boys had made the tow bar wrong! I had drilled and mounted the bumper brackets vertically and they should have been secured horizontally! Maybe

Jenna will bury the Coyote in Cerocahui!

I'm not too superstitious. I don't believe in luck or streaks of bad luck, but things did seem to have taken a turn for the worse. It was all I could do to approach each moment as if nothing had gone wrong for the past day and a half. However, my reality definitely proclaimed I was on the negative side of the events curve.

It's at times like this that I appreciate what the Mexicans have taught me. I jump into things at 150% and fall short of my goal. The Mexicans saunter up to the task at 80%, work forever and achieve two goals. Slow down, Coyote!

Meanwhile, everybody's 20-20 rectal vision had kicked in. I should have brought my drill's battery charger or inverter or AC drill. *I don't do should haves, thank you!* Why didn't you bring a hand brace? *Just because!* Worse yet, Doug's was broken! Maybe we could buy something in town. *No, it's Sunday!* I should have checked the tow bar before drilling. *Sorry, that's another unacceptable should have!* I should have drilled the holes at home. *No, silly, that wouldn't work. Remember, the broken 4X was in Mexico!* Cool it, Coyote! Time for a mind reset.

I'm not exactly sure when I made my attitude, time adjustment, but here's how it works. Everyone has had a difficult time or two in their life. I suspect most everyone can now look back and relate to some arduous experiences in a different, more positive light. We can laugh and tell the "story of terror" with a little levity. I knew what was happening was such an experience. I would surely be laughing and bragging about the event by the next week. Now, remember last month's *Coyote's World* where I moved my "attitude adjustment point" closer and closer to home? I offer it is possible to do the same thing with time. It is very practicable to move tomorrow's attitude back into today's time frame. That is right now. With a less stress-ridden mind, I'm more creative, productive, safer and certainly more enjoyable to be around. I moved next week's attitude into right then. Right there in front of the bumper with four wrong holes! I made the positive time-tweak and absolutely relished the balance of the entire experience!

That night, Doug ensured Librado Chavez would have a drill motor ... if he was in the country.

He's a local boy made good. Born and raised in Cerocahui, he moved to the USA, eventually became treasurer of the Chicago Construction Union and was now retired back in Cerocahui. And it really is a small world, for he has a daughter that lives, where else, right in my home town, Costa Mesa, California.

The next morning, we trekked up to his place to discover he was gone to *La Mesa de Arturo* (between Cerocahui and Urique) to give injections to some folks in need. We were advised he would return in a little while. At the gate, Doug patiently listened to the passing Tecate driver's woes about beer prices while I was approached by another passerby with a deal I couldn't refuse. He wanted to trade his truck and a load of *mota* for the Bronco. "Sorry, I'd never get across the border with that stuff," I informed.

The Bronco was a constant source of attraction. It turned lots of brown-eyed, black-haired heads. "*Muy fuerte* (Very tough). *Muy grandes llantas* (Very big tires)," they'd exclaim. This was cause for mild concern on my part regarding security, however, I never had a problem.

Meanwhile, back at the hotel, I remembered Steve's Readyair compressor. Again, Doug came through. He not only had an air drill, but also had a gas-powered compressor ... that needed a little work. Struggling with the old farmer's, spark plug pre-gap trick, I could almost get the critter to start, but not run! The carb looked like it was flooding the poor puppy to death. Handle it, or move on, Coyote!

Another option in the handle it process is to give up and move on. I'd loved to have fixed his compressor engine. I know I could have made it work, but what was it worth to me in time. It was apparent the primary task was to get the two 4Xs connected, not overhaul a compressor engine carburetor. Move on, Coyote!

After a speedy, quick-connect chuck change, Doug's air drill was plumbed to the Bronco's Readyair system, but I didn't hold much hope for that approach either. On another trip, with Steve's setup, at this very location, we had made a camper shell repair with limited air drill success. The Readyair just couldn't keep up with the volume demands of the air drill. What's more, the air drill only had a quarter inch collet which would not accept the ½" drill bit. But what the heck, it was worth a try. The combined Superwinch bumper and internal brace were ½" thick. I gave



We'll get it right this time!

Photo by Doug Rhodes

up after one pilot hole.

As I spilled a box of sockets and found I couldn't close the Bronco's hood, I wondered what else could go wrong? All I needed then was for Montezuma to strike. Hang in there, Coyote!

"Let's try Librado again," Doug suggested. We found him home and more than willing to help. "Can I first test it here to see if it works?" I asked. "No power, Harry. The town generator doesn't come on until 2 p.m., besides, it worked last time," Librado proudly advised of his drill. "How about some tortillas and beans?" "No thank you, I really would like to chat, but I should get back to my project," I responded.

That's really great, Doug's generator was running, the drill was plugged in, but the trigger switch didn't seem to work! "Doug, you clean the plugs at the drill and the end of the cord and I'll check for power at the extension," I reasoned. Eventually, the unit spun, with Jenna acting as the off-on switch at the plug.

You always want to put a loved one in charge of life-critical tasks. She was very clear that if she failed to shut the unit off in time, she may get to see a bloody, propeller-Coyote at the end of a jammed 1/2" drill bit. Good work, Jenna!

Between the uneven terrain, and the geese and dogs trying to help, it was hard to estimate a perfect tow bar alignment between the Bronco and the Explorer. My plan was to use all of the misdrilled holes and actually drill two different mounting

heights. "With the luck you've had, why not complete one set first, then do the second set if all holds up," Doug advised. That was a reasonable suggestion, but things seemed to be looking up. Both heights of mounting holes were successfully completed. All right, Coyote!

In the meantime, Doug's Mexican wife, Anna Maria, was trying to start his pickup to get to her daughter's baby shower. She needed a couple of five-eighth spark plugs with none available. Guess what the Explorer uses? Several plugs later, she was happily on her way. I was glad to help and I certainly had no need for them on the coming trip home!

With the mounting brackets properly installed, and a couple more Explorer attachment preliminaries out of the way, I made the final adjustment. Years of experience had proved rear (following) tires get far more flats than front tires. I had six tires following the Bronco fronts. I adjusted the Bronco mirrors down to cover its rear tires and all of the Explorer's tires. I couldn't imagine how I could detect a flat on the towed vehicle without making that mirror change. Besides, I'd never towed a 4X that far and I was very apprehensive. Think Mexican, Coyote! Take it one slow mile at a time. With dinner on the table, we headed inside. We'll get an early start *en la mañana*.

We left in the dark and were in Bahuichivo at first light. As we passed through, the ranchers' forlorn faces told me they empathized with the task ahead

of Bronco's duo. They may have even recognized my California 4WDXPRT license from past trips.

I can't tell you how many times I've paid my dues. I've stopped and given directions, offered rides, loaned gasoline, made repairs and fixed flats. Now, it all came back. The new road between Bahuichivo and San Rafael was still under construction. As I approached, I could see graders, skip loaders, bulldozers and dump trucks scurry aside to let me by. The logging trucks even went out of their way to yield to my upward quest. Maybe it was the Bronco's broken Borla exhaust system that made the Mexicans think I was one of them.

The Bronco effortlessly chewed up the hills. Every time she'd begin to labor, I'd grab a lower gear en lieu or more gas peddle. I stopped and checked the tow bar for metal fatigue, too. Think Mexican, Coyote! That combo had to hang together for a 1,000 miles. But I wondered if the speedometer was broken? It hadn't moved off the peg since we started up the grade out of Bahuichivo!

With the speedo finally registering movement, we took time to stop for pictures and still rolled through Creel five hours after departure. I'd loved to have stopped some more to say hello to all of my friends along the way, but I was too task oriented.

We cruised into *Ciudad Guerrero* (E/F-9) at 2 p.m., with that guy behind following real close. He must have been a shortie, for I couldn't even see his head! We topped off the tank and inquired about an automotive electric shop to wire the Shadow's (renamed Explorer) lights to the Bronco system.

What a find! Two other Mexican customers at the shop had lived in the US and spoke a little English. They helped by translating our truck wiring needs, and provided hotel and restaurant information for the night. Two hours later, we were fully illuminated, informed and searching for Hotel *Alicia* and *Restaurante El Cave*.

We were also advised of snow on Mex 2. God, I didn't bring chains. Patience, Coyote, it's not a problem yet!

One of the most difficult things for me to handle in Mexico is getting through the towns. The lack of, and unfamiliar signs, one way streets and lots of traffic are always a challenge. I hadn't pre-run the

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route out of Guerrero, so I now learned a new complication, morning darkness. Luckily, a solitary walker jogged back a block and a half to direct us to the proper street out of Guerrero. Ahead lay three significant twisty grades, each of which crested at over 8,000 feet.

Fortunately, as with the California Sierra, a westerly ascent is far more gentle than an easterly approach. When we neared *Puerto San Luis*, the highest pass, we saw roadside traces of snow. I scrutinized the road for ice as Mother Nature began to put down a blanket of the fluffy white stuff. It was like the mild flurry was diverting our attention away from the Shadow behind.

Jenna normally yells at me for driving in the middle of the narrow Mexican roads and cusses the locals for doing the same. In this case, with the Shadow tailing so close, she was happy to see a couple of feet on both sides of our trucks. I'd learned to relax a bit, kind of like driving sand, but she insisted, "Not too much, Coyote!" She's a stellar companion and definitely helps keep the Coyote in line.

As we roll farther down the highway of experience, we were enlightened with yet another Mexican virtue: creativity and resourcefulness. Do you have any idea how many uses there are for tires? I'm sure it's worthy of a book: *101 Ways to Use a Tire*, by Bear Tyurs.

You can put them on wheels and roll down the highway on them. That's obvious. We've all seen shoes made from tires. That's old stuff, too. Paint DESPONCHADO or LLANTARIA on a real big one and you've let everyone know you're a tire shop. Trim it, turn it inside out and you've got a frilly flower pot. Paint it up to make it real fancy. Line them up and bury them a bit, and you've got a fence. Stack a couple on top of each other, put a post in the middle, fill with rocks and you've secured you fence post on solid rock. Slightly bury one flat, fill it with water or feed and the animals love it. Lean a couple together in an odd fashion and all of the rest of the travelers know there's an accident ahead. Night time? No problem, set one on fire and they really take notice. Critically place a couple on top your house and the wind won't blow your roof off. Half bury one in the ground and you can show your friends where to turn for your backcountry



Taking a break at El Divisadero.

Photo by Jenna Kane

rancho. Stack them four feet high in an arena and you're all set for barrel racing. Throw a small one in the middle of several smiling, little brown faces and you've occupied them for a week. Better yet, rope one in a tree and you've entertained generations. Cut a small strip, nail it to the door frame and you've made a wind proof outhouse door latch. Cut two strips, nail them to the frame and the door, and it freely swings for entry and exit. I'm sure we missed at least another dozen or more innovative uses. I'll bet there are even some kinky ones we'll never get to see, too! Behave Coyote, there's a check coming up!

The PGR (Mexican DEA) drug check between *Buenaventura* and *Nuevo Casas Grandes* (D-9) was the most thorough I'd ever experienced. They sniffed the air in the Shadow's tires, probed her undercarriage and patted her side panels. Maybe they knew of the Shadow, too?. Never the less, we were in and out in a couple of minutes.

We returned the Mexican car importation permits at *Naco* (C-7) and, as a first for me, received a verification receipt.

You'd normally expect to be asked on the US side, "Where were you born," or "Are you both US citizens," or "What are you bringing back from Mexico?" This time, the US agents seemed more interested in Steve's Bronco as they asked, "Is

that a custom bumper?" Both sides of the border were a breeze!

USA terra firma at last! Now, how far could we get before dark. Boy, these Arizona mile markers sure slide by faster than the Mexican K-posts. Besides, it's nice to see them under the 200 mark. With ease and daylight, we made Casa Grande (A-5). One more day and we're home!

By now, even Mother Nature seemed to be on our side. Have you ever driven west on I 8 with a tail wind? We were assisted clear across Arizona, into California and up the grade just west of Ocotillo. That's unheard of! I'd finally gotten used to the Shadow following so close, too. She even seemed to know we were getting close to home because she was certainly wagging her tail. I was also happy, but the Shadow's weaving did challenge my steering skills a bit.

We delivered the patient to our door step in one piece, took her to the shop the next day and two days later, she was happily rolling under her own power. Did we handle it perfectly? I suspect not. Could we have done it without help? Certainly not! Did we handle it successfully? Most assuredly. Have faith you can always handle it, too!

