

COPPER CANYON

April 12-29, 2003

Trip is on: rain, shine or snow!

>>> RETURN INFO DUE BY THURSDAY, MARCH 27 <<<

We're sure this adventure starts long before April for you, too, so here's the first batch of planning data. The information below will help you get started planning and the final mailing will fill in the gaps. **Read it thoroughly, it will greatly facilitate personal and vehicle preparation.**

ACTION REQUIRED OF YOU

First, let's get some important business out of the way. There are several action items that require your detailed attention. Incomplete or missing forms will require both you and us to go through the whole thing twice. We hate to be so nit picky, but insurance is a must for the permits, and our carrier dictates completeness. **Please help with attention to detail and by returning the forms ASAP.**

- 1) Complete a **liability/registration form for each participant** regardless of age. The driver must complete all of the blanks, particularly the: vehicle, year, make, color and license number, insurance carrier, policy number and expiration date, and emergency contact info. Passengers may complete name, guardian if applicable, vehicle info, and anything that differs from their transportation. Although your 4X may have several drivers, there must only be one "DRIVER (of responsibility)" designated on the liability form per 4X. All others are "PASSENGERS" (not passenger *and* driver). Sign and date the forms and remember a guardian signature if applicable. Submit the driver's form as soon as possible. We use your name and vehicle information in the final mailing. Passenger forms are desired at the same time, but for far-away companions, later submittal is OK. We want all forms by July 11.
- 2) The **Exploring Trip Policy form** explains itself and we use the information to make nametags and a passenger/vehicle list handout, so list all of your travelers, print clearly and write the names **exactly as wanted on the tags**. Initial the front side *after you have read it*, and sign and date the back. Since we come from far and wide, there is a phone number(s) blank on the Policy form. With your approval, we print these numbers in the final mailing, giving you the option of contacting others local to you and coordinating your treks together to the departure point. Please note next to the telephone numbers if you do not want them printed in the final mailing. Use the **group contact point** blank to tell us where and when you will connect with the group. It should be Bisbee, Arizona, before we cross the border, at a minimum. We'll provide a detailed itinerary of our route to Bisbee in the final mailing. Ignore the potluck, firewood and video blanks since they do not apply to this trip.
- 3) **Note:** our friend, **Ed Hooper**, is the designated **emergency contact**. He is the person you, or stateside worriers, should contact if something happens. We use him as the focal point for emergency communication. Work/pager is (714) 648-6856; home is (949) 249-6789. Keep these numbers with you at all times. On the bright side, we have never had to use him.
- 4) Return all forms, including the **Vehicle Self-Inspection form**, along with a check for any balance due in the envelope provided by or before **March 27**.
- 5) See **INSURANCE** and **MONEY** (below) for your additional pre-trip responsibilities.
- 6) **YOUR BALANCE DUE IS:** \$ _____

Thanks for your patience regarding the above, now on with the good stuff!

IMPORTANT STUFF!

INSURANCE: Get Mexican liability and property damage insurance! Mexican law DOES NOT recognize USA insurance companies. Also, check with your agent regarding your comprehensive coverage in Mexico. Use the Auto Club, your agent, Oscar Padilla or Sanborn (see your phone book), or join the Discover Baja Travel Club (literature enclosed). It offers discount rates to members. Use the 800# at the bottom of its page for more information. >**You must have your Mexican insurance taken care of before we cross the border.**< Depending on the desired coverage and value of your equipment, insurance costs about \$5-\$10/day. Cheap peace of mind! Understand clearly, if you have an accident without proof of (Mexican) insurance, you are held in jail until it is resolved.

Also, recent law adds a twist to using your car in Mexico. 1) You must either own the car (pink or copy required) or have a release from your lien holder (or owning corporation) regarding taking the car into Mexico. A letter, on letterhead, saying it's OK for you to take the 4X into Mexico is all that's needed. Also, you cannot use a "friend's" car, letter of permission or not. 2) The law says you are required to show proof of Mexican insurance or post a 60-day bond equal to the value of the car before going south of certain check points, but I've never seen this enforced. 3) You must have an up-to-date driver's license. 4) Only a credit card is accepted as payment for the \$10.00 *Banjercito* vehicle fee (cash or check are not accepted).

TOURIST DOCUMENT: This used to be called a "tourist card" and was free. Now, in order to go beyond certain points or be in Mexico more than 72 hours, you must purchase this legally required, 180-peso (\$18) document. Last trip, everything went smoothly by obtaining and filling out the documents at the Naco border. We'll lead the early arrivers to the border on Thursday afternoon to start the tourist document process, which will save time Friday morning.

A certified copy of your **birth certificate** or a **passport** is required as proof of citizenship. A driver's license alone is not sufficient. Any traveler not having any of the above will most likely not be allowed by the Mexican officials to travel beyond a mid-first-day checkpoint. We will not hold up the group for personal/vehicle documentation problems; you will fend for yourself.

GUNS and ILLEGAL DRUGS: NO! NO! NO! Don't carry them! Don't even think about carrying them! If you have a gun or illegal, non-prescription drugs on this trip, we don't know you. I'm serious! You're on your own! Bad business in Mexico. Don't bring them - not even a bullet! Carry your prescription drugs in the original, labeled bottles. One subtle clue you have either guns or drugs, and look for your car to be torn to shreds in search of a bust! I've been courteously searched, many, many times with no problem. They are not out to "get you," just to do their job.

SCHEDULE: We run what we consider a casual, tight ship. We want you to feel you help formulate the plans and schedule, but we must insist on strict adherence to the schedule. In the past I have allowed the late riser to get gasoline. Then, someone else decided to look for ice, and another went to buy film. What started out to be 5- or 10-minute delay turned into 2 hours. The line for gas was longer than expected; the ice purchase was delayed due to lack of change; and the film buyer had to search all over town to find what he needed. As a group, we will set departure times for each morning or stop, then move out on time. I think it is rude and inconsiderate to others in the group to be late or want a last minute change. All departures will be as planned. I'm just a hard-ass ol' trail boss with your well being in mind. Wagons ho!

MEXICO

For years, we've heard the same horror stories about Mexico as you. From our experience, they are mostly untrue and very unfair to the Mexicans. Ugly Americans cause their own problems more than anything.

The Mexicans hold in high esteem the family and "personal things" that we've learned to respect. Go along with their values. We virtually always find them friendly and helpful, but on occasion have felt cheated. So we paid \$10 for 3 gallons of gas — our attitude is its part of the cost of the trip. On the other hand, we've been refunded \$75 when we overpaid a hotel bill. What we want is for you to enjoy the country as much as we do. Give it a chance.

MONEY: Our recommendation is **PESOS** from the first day on! Dollars are marginally OK in some of the heavily touristed areas, and forget anything but pesos in the backcountry. >**Get pesos before you cross the**

border. < There have been several Travelers Check scams, so we recommend against them, too. On our whale watch trip, even the Mexican banks would not cash them. That may be resolved by now, but I would not depend on it. Be aware, with charge cards: **1)** they are not widely accepted (only first and last days, maybe); **2)** the exchange rate is determined when the charge hits the bank, not at the time of purchase.

The matrix in the final mailing will include a very conservative estimate of US\$/day (to be spent in pesos). Total and adjust accordingly *before* you buy your pesos and remember to allow for miscellaneous purchases along the way, which are not factored in. We cannot stress enough the importance of having enough pesos. Exchange houses are few and far between and there are none where we cross the border at Naco.

> **Important:** Obtain as many small peso bills (10s, 20s, 50s, 100s) as possible. Change is definitely a problem everywhere. Mexico uses both the “\$” and “N\$” symbols to indicate price in pesos.

DOGS: Animals are up to you, but very inconvenient on this trip. None of the hotels allow dogs in the rooms. The Mexicans officially require a permit to take a dog as far south as we are going and we have no experience regarding enforcement. You are frequently asked by the US Border Patrol for a current health certificate upon return to the USA.

BANDITOS: Probably not, but consider the Mexicans cagey negotiators. We have never been attacked. We travel only the main roads and trails during daylight hours and are unlikely to encounter the “poppy growers” of *Arizona Highways*’ warnings. We learned on past trips the *Militar* (Mexican army) keeps track of us in the backcountry.

FOOD, WATER, ICE and RESTAURANTS: In general, do not drink or brush your teeth in the tap water, it is not purified! Hotels often provide bottled drinking water, but bring plenty of your own (**2½ gallons** minimum **required** under all circumstances). Ice (hotel and store bought) is usually reliably purified — look for *agua purificada*. Diluted bleach is good for rinsing fresh fruits and vegetables from local markets.

We usually do fine with everything down there, but *you know your own body*, so **take the precautions and actions you best for you**. Carry Lomotil, Imodium or Kaopectate for sure. You can buy Lomotil over-the-counter in Mexico. We can buy basic drug store items and foodstuffs, including bottled water, in several remote towns, but ice is unpredictable. Keep in mind, the electric, heat-exchanger-type coolers can run your battery dead in one night without careful management. Compressor-type freezer/fridges are better but a little pricey and still battery-draining. We handle “ice” on our trips with an ARB freezer and spare battery (see the Jan.-Feb. '01 ECO4WD newsletter). Further, 110 AC is not available overnight at some locations, so plan accordingly.

Regarding *Montezuma*, we believe most people have problems because they significantly change their eating, sleeping, drinking, and exercise habits on a trip of this sort. If you take vitamins in the US, take them in Mexico. If you don’t eat hot sauce in the US, don’t eat it in Mexico. If you don’t drink beer in the US, don’t in Mexico, and so on. Status quo is our key to intestinal status quo! The ultra-cautious wipe off the lips of their bottles/cans and avoid local taco stands and fresh vegetables (lettuce/salads). We like the reassurance of anti-bacterial gels and “Wet-ones” (baby wipes). Avoid ingesting water from the sink or shower, as well.

At restaurants, you must request your check when done. They do not “rush” us. Ask for “*la cuenta, por favor*” (check please) or motion in the air with one index finger as if writing on the flat palm of your other hand. Tipping is the same as in the U.S. – 10-15%.

Continued

Dietary restrictions: It is difficult, although not impossible, to convey vegetarianism or other special dietary restrictions to Mexican restaurants. Bring your own “special” foods and be patient when ordering. Advise us in advance of dietary restrictions for the meals we provide using the Exploring Trip Policy form.

Regarding field lunches, learn to graze – snack along the way. We will most likely make a lunch stop every day, but emergencies or other delays could reduce travel time and lead to grazing. We will sacrifice a lunch stop to eliminate night driving. Avoid glass containers: repackaging pickles, mayonnaise, juice, wine, etc. into plastics. Glass predictably breaks in ice chests! Check the Matrix (coming in the final mailing) for field lunch predictions. Ice is relatively difficult to procure, so consider foods that require less to no refrigeration. We’re fond of the “tuna lunches” that include mayo, relish and crackers. Jerky, chips/granola bars, salami and individually wrapped cheese sticks, bagels with cream cheese, and lots of gorp are items we take regularly.

CLOTHING / VALUABLES: We tend to dress backpacking style – layered. Temperatures range from overnight cold in *Creel* to hot in *Alamos* and we adjust the layers accordingly. Dress is casual. You’ll find *Alamos* most civilized and refreshing. Leave your best and special jewelry at home, just in case. Our cars/hotel rooms are

our only “safes.” Just like at home, neither is 100% burglarproof. On a past trip, a participant arrived home missing a sentimental ring – who knows how or why. We’ll address our “Baja Safe” technique in the final mailing.

WEATHER: Rain is unlikely. April and November averages are minimal, but we never go without a poncho or rain suit. Remember that we must ford the river at *Chinipas*. The depth is unknown from year to year — varying from 10 to 30 inches. *Creel* will be 60/70° in the daytime, 30° at night, which may necessitate a windshield ice scraper. *Alamos* will be hot, up to 95+°! Go prepared for change. ***Trip is on, rain or shine!***

PURCHASES: You can legally bring back 1 quart/liter of liquor per adult along with \$300-worth of trinkets. Fireworks are illegal; check with your Mexican consulate re other items.

GIVEAWAYS: **Optional giveaways** – “kid gifts” – balloons, gum, candy, toothbrushes (and paste!), crayons, pencils, paper, kites, coloring books – are nice diplomats and much appreciated. We prefer more constructive gifts like school supplies (even used ones) to candy, although the kids might not agree. A Polaroid camera and *mucho, mucho* film is another sure-fire way to be a big hit in the remote *pueblos*. We have even been asked to be school/class photographers on past trips. We have two primary stop to unload clothes (warm kid clothes are most needed) and other adult/kid reusables. Pack all items in separate bags/suitcases as if they were yours. It is technically illegal to “import” items, new or used. **Medical supplies** are in even higher demand. We are making it our “mission” to deliver basics such as ibuprofen, bandages of all types, slings, crutches (high in demand), antiseptics, stretchers, etc. See the attached note from Doug Rhodes, our *Cerocahui* hotel owner (days 6-8), regarding his annual community Christmas fiesta and needed items. We’ll save some school supplies for *Temoris* (day 9). It is up to you re bringing any of the above.

4WD DIFFICULTY: Nothing difficult is planned, but Mother Nature could throw us a curve. The dirt roads are bumpy, but not difficult. With caution and good sense, the roads are mostly passable in 2WD. 4WD, like insurance, is just good peace of mind. 4WD *low range* is required for many steep canyon ascents/descents and the river crossing at *Chinipas*. Be sure yours is working before we meet.

Travel speeds: You and your vehicle must be capable of sustaining 65+ MPH on the pavement and 30 to 40 MPH on washboard. We don’t travel unsafely fast, but we must keep the caravan moving to meet our daily distance and hotel requirements on some travel days. We don’t want to beat you to death, so consider this regarding soft topped, rough riding, short wheelbased, high-tire-pressured 4Xs. On most dirt roads, we average 10 to 25 MPH. More on **Roads and Driving** will be covered in the final mailing.

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT: See the **Vehicle Self-Inspection form** for additional vehicle-related considerations (remember to return this form). Also see **GASOLINE** and **SSB CB RADIO** below.

LT (light truck, *not* “P”, passenger) tires are **highly** recommended! We average about six flats per Copper Canyon trip and have had nine on a Baja Adventure. OEM tires are a sure guarantee you will have a flat some time during this trip!

>**REQUIRED ITEMS:** • Yank strap or towrope* • Fan belts (water pump belt, at minimum) • Spare tire (that holds air!) and all the tools/parts needed to change it: >**Inspect and test your jack system to ensure it has all of the necessary components and works properly.**< If you have other than 15” tires, consider an extra tire, since 16” and 17” have not yet arrived in backcountry Mexico. • Gasoline filter: buy a spare, know where it goes and have the special tools to change it. • Five-gallon spare gasoline container (empty) • Any part that you know fails on your vehicle (Cherokee upper radiator hose, etc.) • Spare ignition and door keys • Camping gear/food for one night in (emergency). • Lunches, snacks, drinks and minimum 2 ½ gals. of water.

Regarding other equipment, I’m sure among the group, we’ll have enough tools, tire plugger kits, air compressors, come-alongs, jumper cables, wire, electrical meters, nuts, bolts, etc., to handle most of the unexpected. Our commitment regarding breakdowns is to get driver and passengers to professional help – and we’ve never left anybody anywhere, anytime on this trip (with the exception of *our* Explorer on a past trip).

***Re yank strap:** I usually recommend you find one 30 feet long, 20,000 pounds strong, (flat, yellow) nylon, that has no metal hooks. However, our latest recommendation is the **Master-Pull round** towline (see page 35 of the Bonus Issue or past newsletters (hard copy or on our Web site at www.eco4wd.com). We sell it mail order for \$134 with a new black or red vinyl carrying bag or \$104 without. Since these are drop-shipped, order early to ensure a timely delivery.

GASOLINE: With the rapid growth of this “canyon area” (Copper Canyon is actually six Grand Canyon size canyons), modernized gasoline stations are popping up everywhere. We no longer must prearrange gas and have reduced the amount of spare gas we carry (discussed below). The price is close to, or double ours, depending on location. A **5-gallon gas can is required***, regardless of the size or number of your tanks. Ten gallons of spare gasoline capacity is recommended if you have room. In remote areas, we have had to use our 5-gallon containers to transfer gasoline to our 4Xs.

Regarding the new CARB plastic cans, **Wedco** and **SCEPTER** brands are the best, but may require a funnel. Of the pre-CARB design, **Rubbermaid** is our first choice, with Wedco a close second. They are far superior to Blitzes, and just plain work. Avoid Blitz if possible. **>Test the new-style gas cans at home to make sure they pour properly.<** Do not use any containers that have missing or broken parts! If you have a diesel rig, plan on having a 400-mile (highway) range minimum. We do not know all diesel locations.

*Since it is technically illegal to transport gasoline across the border, do not fill your gas cans before our Naco crossing. We have several days to fill them before we hit the backcountry.

EMERGENCY CAMP GEAR: This is a non-camping trip. However, considering the terrain, our location and distance from civilization, emergency, “survival” **camping gear for one night is required**. We plan to carry **sleeping bags** (required at a minimum) but no tent or cook gear, and will snack as necessary. Since we do have a few early, rural departures, personal coffee-prep gear is nice to have along.

CB RADIO: **Single side band (SSB) is required*** and will be used 100% of the time in Mexico. **Let there be no doubt you have a working SSB radio.** **>Have a shop check your radio or call me if you are in doubt but ensure that it is working properly prior to the trip.<** I seriously recommend, encourage, almost require, you have your SSB slider (clarifier, RIT, voice lock) modified to accommodate group use. **Call me for details.** Unmodified radios are inconvenient to the group. We’ll wile away the hours with a SSB lesson when the group is together. *We’ll use CB channel 1, AM leaving Orange County and around Bisbee.*

Two CB radios are recommended (spare can be AM, emergency type or hand-held). Buy the special plugs, etc. for the hand-held to work with the outside antenna and cigarette lighter power, if you go that route. Check your car cigarette lighter(s) at home, *required*. We want you to be able to communicate with us at all times, in all places, even if your primary radio fails. SSB can copy AM, but AM cannot copy SSB. *Continued* I’ve never had a problem regarding confiscation. I now know a CB importation permit is required, but I do not get one and have never been asked for one. Ham gear requires a permit, too, and importation is iffier.

* **Although we prefer you have your own SSB CB radio, you may rent one from us at \$5/day (\$60).** *

MAPS: Recommended map and info sheet from the International Map Company (1004 Cerro Azul, El Paso, TX 79902-1301 – included): *Sierra Tarahumara, Barrancas del Cobre* (ISBN 0-937455-02-4). Individual topos are fascinating, but very expensive. Contact the Map Link in Santa Barbara (805) 692-6777 or the Map Centre in San Diego (619) 291-3830. The desirable 250,000:1s are, *San Juanito* (G13-1) and *Ciudad Obregon* (G12-3). The 50,000:1s are better: *Creel* (G13A22), *San Jose Guacayvo* (G13A21 is unavailable), *San Rafael* (G13A31), *Temoris* (G12B39), *Cieneguita* (G12B49), *Batopilas* (G13A41), *Chinipas* (G12B38), *Guadalupe Victoria* (G12B28), *Guajaray* (G12B27), *San Bernardo* (G12B37) and *Alamos* (G12B47). More about these is provided in our \$5 (reg. \$6) newsletter reprint on “Copper Canyon”. \$5 included with your paperwork gets you one.

MISCELLANEOUS: Our hotel in Cerocahui uses kerosene lanterns and wood stove heat. Be prepared to light them and get used to the smell. • Mexico’s electricity is the same as ours, including the plugs. • The hotels and gas stations want you to put your used toilet paper in a plastic bag-lined waste paper basket along side, not in, the toilet. • Remember an alarm clock since there are no wake up calls in the hotels. • Flashlights are a must. • Water faucets: “C” may mean cold or *caliente* (hot); “F” may mean *fría* (cold); and all designations may be reversed. • No hotel washcloths are provided on this trip. • Insect repellent is highly recommended; the no-see-ums are annoying. • Dry air is a constant; bring moisturizer!

BISBEE, AZ (April 17): We recommend the group stay together at the **San Jose Lodge** on Thursday, April 17. It is located outside of town at 1002 Naco Hwy; (520) 432-5761; email: sanjoselodge@cs.com

Make your own reservations ASAP, since this night is not included in the trip fee and they are filling up for April. Tell them you are with our “ECO4WD” group. A **single queen** is \$65 and a **king**, \$75 - (plus tax). Other arrangements are available.

We have been encouraged by past participants to suggest you take an extra day at the beginning of the trip to explore Bisbee. Bisbee is charming and quaint, with lots of little shops and history. During the week, the shops tend to close early, around 5 p.m., so keep this in mind. We've included a tri-fold (not to scale) Bisbee map and visitor's guide. The San Jose Lodge (#67) is located at the bottom-center of the map.

We will reach Bisbee between 3-4 p.m. Plan on attending a Dutch-treat get-acquainted dinner at **The Brewery** restaurant (#39 on the enclosed Bisbee map). We will make the arrangements.

>***Friday Morning (Apr 18) departure: 7:30 a.m. sharp. Arizona is on MT – may be a time change.***

TUCSON (April 29): Upon return to the USA, we'll use the **Rodeway Inn** (520-622-7791) located just off our arrival 10 Fwy at 1365 W. Grant Ave. (exit 256). April rates are: King, \$49.50 or two Fulls, \$59.50. Both are plus tax and a 20% discount is honored for AAA and a few other programs. Next door (same property) is the **Hampton Inn (Tucson) North** at 1375 W. Grant Ave., which offers nicer rooms at a higher rate. We just sleep and leave at 5:30 a.m. the next morning, so amenities are not a high priority for us this night. You must make your own reservations; this night is not included in the trip fee. The Hampton Inn telephone number is (520) 206-0602. It offers a 10% discount upon check in for AAA or AARP.

FINAL MAILING: A matrix of DAY versus ITEM [Activity; Attraction; Destination; Lodging; Meals; Miles covered; Gasoline used; dollars (to be spent in pesos) per the day and other reminders] is included with the final mailing. It will go far toward personal planning and answer many of your questions. Include questions with your return forms and balance due by March 27. We'll answer your questions in the final mailing, due out when we get all of your paperwork or by March 31. >**This information will not be repeated in the final mailing, so keep these sheets.**<

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