



Una Corrida Especial

By Dino DeConcini

As some of you old timers may recall, from 1981 to 1994 I mailed out around 25 short accounts of various trips, broadly defined, to family members and friends. The quality of the writing varied but most were interesting to some degree or another. A few readers offered encouragement, and one addressee, a published author (as my mother Ora used to introduce her husband Morris), said he kept them in a magazine rack in the bathroom, as they were just about the right length.

My wife Beth, also a published author, thought they were worth editing for a little book, at least for family and close friends. However I had gotten too busy or lazy or a combination of the two, and not only did not do the editing but stopped writing them altogether. This lasted until last October when the experiences of a visit to a round up at Rancho Saquenovérachi in Sonora, Mexico, proved impossible not write about.

I hope you enjoy the following account, and let me know by clicking on the update link on the bottom of the page if you would like to be on an email list for future travel notes, if there are any.

Dino

Una Corrida Especial: A Special Round-up

Last October I spent a week with Charles DeConcini, Linda McKittrick, and Julia DeConcini at their *Rancho Saquenovérachi*,¹ near the town of Bacadéhuachi in northeastern Sonora, Mexico. They are all artists. Charles, a distant cousin become close friend, transforms old, sometimes abandoned adobe structures into beautiful, habitable spaces; Linda, his long-time partner and our new friend, sews, quilts, embroiders, and even created a life sized portrait of Charles out of fabric pieces. Appropriately, her email address is needleworker1@mac.com. Julia, Charles' daughter, is a graduate of Evergreen College in Washington State, an excellent photographer and founder of the Tucson Community Darkroom (tucsoncommunitydarkroom.org). Charles and Linda live on an acre or so in NW Tucson off Swan Road near the Rillito River. It's sort of a mini-farm in the city with an adobe house surrounded by vegetable gardens, fruit trees, chicken pens, beehives and Charles' collection of unusual objects. Linda once had a pet pig.

THE TRIP

The trip began at dawn when they picked me up in their Chevy Crew Cab (five passenger pickup), loaded with equipment and provisions for the ranch and the roundup. Two hours later we crossed into Sonora at Douglas/Agua Prieta, where the friendly and courteous Mexican Customs and Immigration authorities, respectfully yet firmly, relieved us of all our fresh organic fruit and 294 pesos² each for Julia and my tourist permits. Charles and Linda have permanent status and seemed to know everyone, and Charles was greeted there and everywhere with *abrazos* like a long-lost relative.

For all my trips to Mexico, especially Sonora, I had never been in the northeast part of that state except for one visit to Valer and Josiah Austin's dramatically restored lands of former cattle ranches along the border east of Agua Prieta.³

Taking Mexican National Highway 17 south from Douglas, the landscape is much like the southeastern Arizona Sky Island Mountains separated by seas of rolling grasslands, split by ribbons of green cultivation along the north-south stream beds. Farther south, nearing the Sierra Madres Occidentales, the mountains get closer together and the grasslands become crowded into foothills.

We passed the smokestack of the smelter north of Narcozari and then through the town, remarkable for its scattered, man-made hills of bright yellow tailings from milling operations. The original mine owned by Phelps Dodge ran out of ore years ago, but the new La Caridad deposit discovered a few miles to the southeast is now the third largest copper mine in the world, according to Wikipedia. The town is sometimes called Nacozari de Garcia after the heroic train engineer who was killed driving a train on fire carrying a load of dynamite so it would explode out of town and not destroy whole place.

Our last stop on Hwy 17 was the thriving city of Moctezuma, the economic center of the region serving the surrounding ranches and farms, where we did a little banking. Charles pointed out the extraordinary stone façade of a small building, a kind of Mexican riff in miniature of the Library at Ephesus. He intends someday to measure, photograph, and then reproduce it at a different scale as a part of some future project in Tucson.

We then headed east to the town of Granados for a very late lunch with Charles and Linda's good friends Patricia and Angel Trujillo. After living many years in the U.S., they returned here to retire and build a two-story Alpine-style chalet. They will join us for the roundup along with Angel's brother Eloy, a rancher and veterinarian, who will be working for us in his professional capacity. We did not know then how soon we would be back in Granados and Moctezuma.

Our last lap crossed over a pass in the imposing Sierra Huásalo and onto the ranch's dirt and occasional rocky, bone-jarring, stream-bed road. We arrived in the dark around eight, 14 hours after leaving Tucson. Charles and Linda make this trip every couple of months and the trips are getting longer and more frequent.

THE RANCH

The ranch has 4,000 acres from the stream-bed of the Rio Bacadéhuachi valley to the crest of the *cordillera* or mountain range to the East. The elevation runs from around 5000 to 7000 feet. Most of the land, consisting of foothills and canyons, is divided into ten *potreros* or pastures. Each brims with nutritious grasses and has piped water from two 300-foot deep wells pumped by solar power from a depth of 60 feet. There are several irrigated milpas or fields along the river for raising sorghum, sacaton and other forage crops, which are baled and stored in small barns as insurance against future drought. There is also extra water storage in ponds and tanks around the ranch, including one tank on top of a nearby hill, providing running water to the kitchen by gravity. In short, it was naturally well-endowed and now has been much improved for raising cows.

The ranch headquarters (HQ) is on one of the anconas, flat areas where the canyons widen, and includes the main corrals, several adobe buildings for cooking, eating, sleeping, tack, storage, an old trailer for Charles and Linda's residence, and two *baños* or bathrooms. One even has an outdoor shower with solar heated water! In reality, they are spacious, comfortable out houses, much nicer than the cramped one I remember as a kid on Grannie Webster's and Aunt Zola Claridge's farm in Thatcher, Arizona, furnished with only a multipurpose Sears and Roebuck catalog.

Charles and Linda bought the ranch 15 years ago intending to create a sustainable parallel universe in contrast to their lives in Tucson. All ranch income has been reinvested in improvements - the water system, fencing, roads, and breed stock, speaking of which . . .

THE HERD

The herd consists of about 150 cows and calves and a dozen or so bulls, mostly Charolais, the large French breed most popular in Sonora for its ability to thrive in difficult conditions, and, Charles adds, "easy to see at a distance." From this base, Charles plans to expand the herd by holding back from sale some of the best *beceras* (female calves) for future breeding. Castrated *beceros* (steers) are routinely sold, with the rare exception of one or two kept for future bull in training candidates. Other expansion practices include crossbreeding, by leasing bulls for temporary duty and buying or trading for pregnant cows of other breeds adapted to the region.

One of the bulls is a Brahman and one of the breeds Charles is considering is

Brangus, a cross between Brahman and Black Angus. He believes the ranch can easily support 300 or more cattle, but plans to expand gradually and carefully. Other animals include what they call a *remuda*, a collection of six or eight horses, a couple each of mules and burros, some dogs and cats and at least one rattlesnake.

THE VAQUEROS

The *vaqueros* or cowboys whom Charles has hired for this *corrida* comprise most of the adult males of the Carriaga family, known around the area for generations for their hard work, honesty, strength, ability to handle animals and do the hundred other things a ranch continually needs. Loreto,⁴ age 43, is the lead and lives at the ranch, even though he has a comfortable house and corral with a couple of horses in Bacadéhuachi. His handsome, lined face exudes quiet competence under the stiff, white straw cowboy hat, which is part of the vaquero uniform. For this roundup, he recommended hiring his father, Jesús, who in his 60's, seems every bit as able as the son; his uncle Manuel, a quiet soul whose deeply lined face bespoke a hard life; and his younger brother Sabas, a superb, somewhat jolly vaquero. His son Loreto Junior, age 11, joined us on the last day when he was not in school.

All full and part time workers are paid the same daily wage, but key persons like Loreto receive special perks, e.g. clothes, food, tires, school support for their kids, etc. Loreto may also run a few of his own cows with the ranch herd including free food, veterinary services and breeding. Another example would be the fully functioning attached bathroom for Loreto and his wife Viquí which is planned.

Full time work allows Sunday off, starting Saturday mid afternoon to Monday midmorning, recognizing that it takes several hours to get from town to the ranch by horse. Pickups are used sparingly because of the cost of gas. In the past, Charles has tried paying more than local wages to get the best vaqueros but found it created subtle problems in this closely knit society.

Loreto's wife, Viquí, a pretty and wonderfully good natured and competent ranch wife, also came for the *corrida*, and provided three meals a day for five days for 13 hungry people plus constant coffee and freshly made tortillas. Along with meat and lots of chili dishes, she made fabulous tamales and taught Julia how to make delicious empanadas with sweet squash filling which became every meal's desert. She did all this with great good humor and in a kitchen which can best be described as ranch rustic. For three of these days, she gave up income from her town job taking care of two children of the Mayor. Charles was considering compensating her other than in cash, but Linda and Julia did not agree, and in the end, she was paid the same as the men - and was very happy.

La CORRIDA: DAY ONE

On day one we had three preliminary items to get out of the way before we began working cattle. First was to build an enclosure for the outdoor shower to provide privacy for the women. With Charles' direction and occasional participation, the four-man crew got the *baño's* concrete floor extended and the precut (in Tucson) metal enclosure frame in place, all in less than two hours. Everyone was very busy.

Next was to move a large pile of mesquite firewood from one of the outlying potreros back to HQ as the daily fuel supply for Viquí's indoor and outdoor stoves and the future branding-iron fire. With the Chevy truck, and three of the crew, we got most of it loaded and back in less than an hour.

Finally, as customary, was to select, slaughter and butcher an animal for the *corrida* to feed all involved, e.g., family, friends, neighbors, local officials and church members, etc.; then to make *carne seca* (dry meat or jerky) and to freeze the rest for use on the ranch for the next few months. This operation got underway around two in the afternoon.

Loreto had placed two cows in a corral for consideration: an old white one, long beyond her productive years, calmly, obviously, chewing her cud, and a larger, younger, dark brown "trouble maker," who during every *corrida* was among the last to be found, resisted coming in, and once in the corral, tried to hide out in the corners. Further she seemed to influence other cows to do the same. She glared at us unblinking. Charles told Loreto to go ahead and pick one, but he replied, "*No, Carlos. Le toca a Usted.*" (It's your call.) Charles picked the brown.

Next was where to do it. The town *rastra* (slaughterhouse), even with rudimentary facilities, was far preferable to doing it on the ground at the ranch, but this posed some serious logistical problems. The truck lacked side rails, so the cow had to be downed, bound and moved into the truck bed. Then in town, she would have to be taken out of the bed, unbound, gotten up and led to the killing slab, alongside a sliding door of the *rastra*. I'll spare you the details, but she fiercely resisted every step of the way and it took Loreto and his experienced crew of three, one mounted, with all their strength and skill, to get it done.

Charles showed the local official his permit from the Juez del Campo (brand inspector) and the killing was quick. Loreto deftly cut open a major artery in the cow's neck, blood gushed into a lowered section of the *rastra* floor and in a few minutes the cow stopped breathing. The crew immediately began flaying the carcass with small knives, one side at a time, and Charles helped with the butchering. Ribs and large joints were severed with an ax. The major viscera, an enormous blob, was left there for the attendant who would get rid of it and clean up the place for 50 pesos, which he certainly earned.

As the butchering proceeded, separate cuts were placed on two cement-top tables

inside the rastra to cool for later putting into plastic bags which Linda and I labeled for each cut. Finally the bags went into two large ice chests. One of these went to a large ranch freezer at Loreto's house in town. The other, along with the head and some large bones with meat still attached, went into the back of the truck to go the ranch. There, some of that portion was crammed into the kitchen's smallish gas fridge and freezer, and the rest was either cut thinly, salted and hung on a wire for carne seca or boiled down in a huge pot for what purpose I did not ask.

I did ask Loreto what he was going to do with the head. He seemed surprised at the question but replied that the head had the best meat of all. "*Nunca has comido tacos de cabeza?*" ("Have you never eaten head-meat tacos?"). I had not or at least not that I was aware of, but later we did - and he was right.

Julia photographed the whole process, including the audience sitting on a high fence around the slab - two curious boys at the start, growing to over a dozen as the word got out, all enjoying the whole show immensely. We got back to the ranch five hours later, a little after seven, and talked about how our children are so carefully shielded from such lessons as to what it takes to put meat on the table.⁵

La CORRIDA: DAY TWO

On day two, early in the morning, we were presented with an unexpected shift from corrida and ranch activities. Linda told Charles and me that the rash she began experiencing before leaving Tucson was getting worse and could no longer be ignored. She had gone to Tucson Medical Center emergency room the night before we left, for an exam, and received a diagnosis and some medication which was not working. We dropped everything, reviewed options and drove to the top of the nearest hill to obtain cell phone service to call their friend Patricia in Granados. Patricia said to come immediately to her house, where she would have an Emergency Medical Technician from the Matamoros Hospital in Moctezuma. He lived in Grandos when not on duty, and would be available to take a look and advise what he thought should be done. Charles had to stay to keep the corrida preparations on schedule, but Linda, Julia and I left immediately.

At Patricia's house, the EMT took one look at the rash and strongly advised we go to Moctezuma to see a Dr. Madrigal. He would make arrangements by phone. We arrived around noon and everything was in order, beginning with a blood draw (not done in Tucson) at a laboratory where the doctor had a consulting office. While that was being analyzed, we had lunch across the plaza at the Heradura (horseshoe) Restaurant and returned for Linda's afternoon appointment. After the exam, Dr. Madrigal walked Linda about a half block to the hospital, and brought in another doctor, an internist, to consult. They decided it was a bacterial infection and prescribed an IV drip containing antibiotics, anti-inflammatories and antihistamines, to be followed by several medications which we picked up at the hospital pharmacy.

We were back at the ranch in time for supper, and by bedtime, Linda was already feeling better. The next day the rash was receding. The hospital may have had some peeling paint and spalling concrete, but we had no complaints about the quality of rural Mexican medical services. Linda felt she got better care in Mexico than in Tucson.

La CORRIDA: DAY THREE

Day three and the corrida began in earnest. Unlike many ranches in Mexico, Charles runs two corridas a year, spring and fall, where the entire herd is brought in for health examination, vaccination, and what they call "*La Estética*." (This is where the vet trims off the long hairs around each bull's penis. They don't seem to mind at all, and it is said to improve their success rate in impregnating the cows.) Large calves are branded, given ear tags and notches, and sharp horns are trimmed as needed.

The typical day starts at first light, about 4:30 am, when Viquí fires up the inside and outside stoves and begins preparing food for breakfast and the rest of the day. Loreto soon leaves for the corrals with a cup of coffee and the other vaqueros drift in and follow suit. By the time I get up, organized and down to the corrals, the crew has collected a half dozen cows with their calves sucking to bring down the milk. Then about three at a time, the calves are waved off and the cows are milked into small metal pails. The milk is dumped into a large plastic bucket until it reaches six to eight quarts. It is then hauled back to the kitchen for the next round of coffee, and later, for Viquí to make various types of fresh, what we used to call, farmer cheese. The calves are returned to their moms and the processing of adult cows and bulls begins.

They are taken in small groups from a large corral into a smaller staging corral and then down a narrow, metal-lined corridor ending in the squeeze chute. Julia told me that until a few years ago, this process was complete mayhem - the vaqueros, some with whips or long sticks, would be yelling, cursing, wildly waving their white straw hats and beating the cattle, which, now terrified, would crash into corral walls and kick up enormous amounts of dust before getting to the chute, which they then resisted entering.

Then Charles and Linda read *Animals in Translation*, by Temple Grandin, and this is the "Special" part of the title, and for me, the most interesting part of the whole event. Grandin is a professor of animal science at Colorado State University and is autistic. She has become renowned for her extraordinary ability to understand how animals think and how to best work with them, large and small, tame and wild. She has written many other books on the subject, including one specifically for handling the cattle, which is at the ranch. Charles' reaction was to introduce the first steps in what he says will become a completely silent roundup. Now the cattle are moved up to the chute with virtually no talking, using only small red flags on short sticks to direct them. Resistance is minimal. I was surprised to learn that Grandin permits

sparing use of a cattle prod if all else fails, but not surprised to learn that this ranch does not even own one.

Since Grandin's principles have been applied to this first stage two years ago, there is much less dust, and there has not been a single case of pinkeye, a highly contagious, dust-borne disease which had previously been a perennial problem. Charles' goal is to eventually have an entire silent, dust free roundup. He couples that with a longer term goal of introducing Valer Austin's Permaculture practices in water conservation and land restoration to create a model cattle ranch and farm for semi-arid climates.

Seen on every cattle ranch, the squeeze chute or *trampa*, is used to hold each animal immobile for a few minutes for those things the vet needs to do, and sometimes for branding. As the cows get to the end of the corridor they can see the vet and chute operators, and some of them balk. Sabas, operating the front or exit gate, leaves it open so the cow will think she can just walk through, but then he slams it closed at the last moment once she is in. Loreto then slides the back gate closed if she is in all the way in, and pulls the rope squeezing the sides together to hold her in place for Eloy's veterinarian work.⁶ With the efficiency of a surgical nurse, Linda prepares, hands Eloy and then takes back the high-tech, German-made syringes. Manuel, the Juez del Campo (Brand Inspector, a state official), clips on a new ear tag and calls out the number which I record. Finally, Sabas springs open the gate and the cow bolts out.

Charles is studying the chute operation per Grandin's recommendations to make it quieter and to make the work crew less visible until the cow is inside. However *corrida* traditions run deep, so he has to bring along the vaqueros to understand why and to agree, rather than just order something done.

My job was Tallyman, noting for each animal: the new government ear tag number; the color (Blanco, Negro, Amarillo, what I would call tan); the brand, either Linda's for the females, which was the symbol for infinity which the vaqueros called 'Ocho' (8), or Charles' double cross for the males; and finally, whether it had recently birthed a calf, and if so, what sex.⁷

When the last cow was released, we broke for lunch and that afternoon I got my big chance to be a cowboy. Jesús and Sabas were riding out to bring in a missing cow and three-day-old calf. Loreto saddled a horse for me, Charles got me a small pair of chaps (Linda's), and I was on my way. As we rode out, Sabas went ahead and was soon out of sight. Jesús stayed back, probably to keep an eye on the patron's cousin. After a half hour or so, I was thinking this was just about the right amount of horse time for my belated return to the saddle.

Then we turned up a side canyon, and sometime later saw Sabas, off the trail and coming back with the cow trotting ahead of him, and the calf, about the size of a

medium sized dog, scampering right behind. (Hence "Get along little doggie.") They disappeared into the brush and Jesús and I turned back on the trail.

By this time the major joints of my lower body had definitely had enough and I feared we were miles from HQ. Suddenly Sabas reappeared with his charges and skillfully got them through a gate where some other cows were standing and watching. I thought these were additional strays we would have to take back to HQ. To my relief it turned out that this was the *potrero* nearest the HQ and we were practically home; none too soon.

La CORRIDA: DAY FOUR

Day four and the *corrida* continues, but with some unexpected visitors. The main job was to process the rest of the herd, i.e., calves too young to brand, as well as *beceros* and *beceras*, older animals, some not yet branded. First, the little guys had to be separated from their mothers into adjoining corrals. This did not go down well with either group, judging by the loud, continuous, contentious mooing. Then the young calves were combined with the older animals and all were waived down the corridor and into the chute for Eloy to examine and vaccinate. This went fairly smoothly. The animals could not see the mesquite fire with the branding irons, and the only distress was the sawing off of a few sharp horn tips for those needing it, which could be surprisingly bloody.

Then the calves were returned to their mothers, which was truly heartwarming to watch. The gate between the two corrals was opened and some cows were waved in with the calves and vice versa. The main sound was contented sucking. For the few calves left stranded, several cows were willing to accept a second young customer. The mooing ceased.

The last job was to brand the unbranded older calves. The most convenient way would have been to do it when they were in the chute. However most of the brandees would be coming back for future exams and vaccinations, and Charles did not want them to associate the chute with that trauma. So post-chute, the unbranded were put in a corral adjoining the main one, then brought in two at a time and the grand finale of a Wild West roundup began. Waiting there with lariats were Loreto, his three adult relatives, Loreto Junior, and Patricia's husband Angel.

Although this was hard work, they all had some fun showing off their skills. Each calf had to be lassoed over the head and around the back legs, which was trickier, and there were a lot of misses and joshing comments. Once the animal was brought down and held by two lassos, the Juez del Campo clipped on a new ear tag and shouted the number to me; identifying notches were cut into the ears with the same pocket knives that were then used for castration of those eligible; that tender area received a squirt of disinfectant; Loreto took the hot iron out of the fire and applied it

firmly for a smoky eight to ten seconds; the animal protested; Junior splashed on some cold water and the animal was released. By this time the second one would be in some dusty stage of capture and the routine repeated. Then two more, etc., until done, about two hours from the start.

As we walked back to the kitchen, Jesús mentioned that he had seen some soldiers in the area and suggested that in case they dropped by, we hide the 50 or so pieces of *carne seca* still on the line. Jerky was particularly attractive to the military out in the field so we got it all into three large plastic bags and into the back room of the trailer in record time.

The first visitor to walk in to HQ, however, was a tall young man, a civilian dressed in black and sporting a short beard, which was unusual in these parts. He said he was looking for a job and several of us chatted with him over coffee without learning much. Someone explained that the *corrida* was finished so there was nothing available, and he eventually walked down the road toward the highway and town. We thought he might have been hired to grow *mota* (marijuana) and had either finished the harvest or been burned out by soldiers.

Almost on cue, three soldiers arrived a half hour later, all good looking, very polite young hunks from a battalion based in Hermosillo, out on a month's assignment to burn *mota* plantations. We had some pleasant conversation in spite of their ever-present automatic rifles. They filled their 10-gallon container of water and somehow lugged it up the steep trail behind the HQ back to where the rest of the unit was camped.

Meanwhile, some of the vaqueros saddled up to take most of the herd off to a lush *potrero*. It was one of the quietest nights of the week. Two calves were born.

La CORRIDA: DAY FIVE

Day five brought visits from - more *soldados*; and to - some Mormons.⁸ With the main work done and a relatively peaceful night, everyone slept in, i.e., until about five a.m. for Loreto and Viquí, and maybe six for the *Patrón*.

After breakfast, Loreto left to do something, Charles left for town in the truck to do some ranch shopping, and Linda, Julia and I hiked up the same steep trail as the soldiers for a multipurpose walk - aerobic exercise; view and photograph the stunning panorama, which was about half the ranch from peak to valley, with Bacadéhuachi in the background; and, since we were within cell phone signal range, I could call my wife Beth and Julia could call her fella.

On the way back, we noticed in the far distance a truck grinding along one of the ranch roads, and also some smoke half way up one of the taller peaks. More soldiers?

Burning marijuana fields? Sure enough, within the hour the truck came jerking down the rocky stream-bed by the HQ with about a dozen soldiers, including yesterday's visitors. Again all carrying automatic rifles and were very friendly and polite. We learned they preferred to be in the field rather than at their base in Hermosillo. There was three times as much *mota* growing in Sonora this year compared to previous years. They never met any resistance; as soon as the growers saw them, they fled.⁹

The soldiers wanted to take a lot of water along with one of Charles' 50-gallon fiber glass drums. Since we had plenty of water and Charles got the drum for free from a hospital, he was happy to oblige. They began filling it from a hose connected to our kitchen water system, which was obviously going to take an hour or more. We were anxious to leave to visit Charles and Linda's friends at La Mora, a Mormon community about 60 miles north, but were unwilling to leave Viquí there alone. Fortunately, Loreto came back, and though he was also eager to get to town, he agreed to stay until the soldiers had left.

MORMON EMIGRATION

Mormon emigration from Utah to the South came in waves. Some of the early ones settled in northern Arizona, e.g. the Udall, Snow and Flake families. Many came farther south into the Salt River Valley and founded Mesa, and other towns in Central Arizona. Others including my maternal grandparents Oscar Webster and Olla Dameron Webster came in covered wagons to the upper Gila Valley where they founded farming towns like Central, (where my mother Ora was born), Thatcher and Ft. Thomas in Graham County. Another group went even farther south to Casas Grandes, Chihuahua, Mexico, especially after the church abolished polygamy as a condition for Utah to join the Union in 1896. Many of these Mexican Mormons continued to practice polygamy and some do so even today; others including Romney's grandparents and parents, did not. They created prosperous communities mostly based on farming and ranching and contributed greatly to the economy. As far as I know the Mexicans welcomed them, appreciated what they accomplished, and have had no problem with those who are polygamous.

I was surprised to learn from Charles that in northeastern Sonora, there is a Mormon colony called La Mora, both prosperous and polygamous. I was more than a little curious, given my own Mormon heritage, to know more about them. Charles and Linda had good relationships with almost everyone in La Mora, and Charles also had a couple of business subjects to discuss: possible cattle breeding exchanges - his *Charolais* for their *Brangus*; and the cultivation of *chiltipin*, a wild and valuable chili, a variety of which they were apparently raising successfully. Charles thought might be cultivable on his ranch, providing additional employment and income.

Approaching La Mora along the Bavispe River, we passed hundreds of acres of pomegranate groves with *chiltipin* intercropped, then a thousand acres or more of

pecan trees, and then another thousand or so prepared for future planting. The paved road ended with the settlement, a collection of half a dozen or so very large, beautifully built and landscaped homes, along with everything needed to support a serious agribusiness economy - an irrigation system with canals and pumps, the latest and best farm machinery, a complete machine shop, crop storage facilities, etc. They also operate the Brangus ranch somewhere in the nearby area.

We first went to the home of Margaret, their best friend in La Mora. Though we had not called ahead, we just walked in, past a living room and into a large kitchen-dining-family area. Margaret welcomed us with a hearty greeting which included, "Would you like a cup of coffee?" I was somewhat taken aback, knowing the Mormon prohibition against hot drinks which has been expanded to include all caffeinated beverages, but after the long drive, we all were happy to accept. (I actually considered, for a very brief moment, testing things further by asking if I could have a beer, but immediately thought better of it).

Margaret is a gem - tall, 48, attractive with that healthy, Mormon look, relaxed, self-confident, charming...I could go on. She has 10 children by her husband David. A bevy of her teen-age daughters came in and were introduced, all looking like younger versions of Margaret. Since David wanted more children and Margaret did not, she agreed for him to take a second wife. This was Dawna, who later joined us in Margaret's family room area. (The living room we passed through was common space uniting two wings of the house, one for each family). Dawna, in her early thirties, has about eight children so far with David, and another one on the way. She is attractive and very nice though perhaps not as self-assured as Margaret. We were all curious as to how David decides which wing to spend the night in, but no one asked.

Margaret made each of us a delicious burro, poured a second cup of coffee, and told me her story. Raised in a polygamous family in Casas Grandes, Chihuahua, she did not care for it and left to live with a sister in Los Angeles. (Her father had 10 wives and she has +/- 52 siblings.) Later she became a born-again Christian, and then met, fell in love with and married a Mormon and came with him to La Mora.

Each family originally home-schooled their children, but now they have three women from the community who are qualified to teach from K- 12. Margaret had nothing against college for those who want to go, but has observed that the college students who come back seemed to have a stronger interest in partying than they did in working hard to promote the family enterprises.

We later met and chatted briefly with other members of the La Mora Community who were friends of Charles and Linda, but there was not time to get into discussions of cattle exchanges or *chiltipin* production, so Charles left that for a phone call or another visit.

We returned to the ranch, slept well, and drove back to Tucson the next morning. It was a rich, unforgettable week which taught me what a complex challenge it is to successfully operate a cattle ranch. I also gained huge respect for Charles' and Linda's courage to take this on in Mexico, which required them to learn another language and culture as well. Final note: It is definitely possible to live a week without TV, newspapers, smart phones or computers.

Notes:

¹ These names plus Nacozari and many others, and a few archeological sites, are the only legacy of the Ópata Indians, once numbering as many as 70,000. See their interesting role in Mexican history in Wikipedia.

² US \$22.50 at 12.8 pesos to \$1.

³ See Oprah magazine September 2012 or Google "Oprah magazine Valer Austin."

⁴ The name Loreto, according to Catholic lore, was the name of the humble house in Nazareth in which Mary received the Annunciation, and in which Jesus was raised. The house was miraculously flown by angels first to a site in Croatia, and then when the Ottomans began moving in, to two different sites in Italy, the last being in Umbria, where today it is enclosed in a marble cathedral. There is a feast day in the liturgical calendar for The Virgin of Loreto and our Loreto got his name from being born on that day. The Virgin of Loreto is also the patron saint of pilots.

⁵ This whole affair reminded me of the slaughter of a goat at an Arcosanti solstice celebration on a theme of food years ago, but I'll save it for another story.

⁶ Quickly examine and administer vaccinations, subdural in the neck and intramuscular in the haunch.

⁷ Loreto, who apparently knows every animal including this history, gives me this info. Charles says he is right 95% of the time.

⁸ The proper name is the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints, sometimes abbreviated LDS. However I'm told the members have accepted the name "Mormon" which I will use. Joke from "Jack" (non practicing) Mormon former Congressman Morris Udall: What is the difference between LSD and LDS? Give up? Answer: With the first you get a short trip and with the second you get a 2-year mission. But I digress.

⁹ Charles actually had visited some of the growers previously. They were all young, unemployed men who would far prefer a legitimate job. They were armed, sort of, with ancient rifles and few bullets.