

Our Ocean Backyard — *Santa Cruz Sentinel* columns by Gary Griggs, Distinguished Professor of Earth and Planetary Sciences, UC Santa Cruz.

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The Pirates Land in Mexico**



The stolen sailboat - the ketch Tira

As our young pirates continued their adventure, crossing the entrance to the Sea of Cortez, they began to encounter other boats. They also found lots of flying fish on the deck in the morning, having hit their sails during their nighttime flights.

They had no problems on the 325-mile sail to the mainland coast of Mexico where they spotted the headlands of Banderas Bay, and what was in 1938 the small fishing village of Puerto Vallarta in the interior of the bay. After now sailing for almost a month and covering nearly 2000 miles since leaving home, the hills covered with dense jungle above the village looked like a tropical paradise to the three boys so they decided to make landfall here.

They were soon approached by some Mexican men who paddled out in a large dugout canoe, and who wondered why three young boys were sailing such a large boat by themselves. They anchored and over the next several days began to explore the small village with its cobblestone streets, and whitewashed adobe buildings with red tile roofs.

They also noted the unique church that is one of the landmarks of Puerto Vallarta today with its dome capped by a crown. The local people were very friendly and some followed them wherever they went. As the boys made friends, they were soon asked into a local home for a traditional Mexican dinner, a welcome relief from the canned food and occasional fish they had been surviving on over the past month at sea.

Word of the boys' arrival soon got to the port captain, however, who requested a meeting so he could question them about their trip and the boat. The Captain didn't speak English, but through an interpreter he decided that they lacked the proper papers for foreign travel.

The three boys seemed to have been wise and capable beyond their years. They had already considered that they might have an issue like this arise in a foreign port, so had concocted a story for just such an event.

The port captain questioned them all separately, but they all had the same story and had also assumed fictitious names. Bud Tara became Bud Foote to match the name of the actual boat owner, Lew Foote, which was on the *Tira's* papers. Their story

was that they were sailing to Panama to meet Bud's brother, Lew, and then were going to sail to the East Coast of the United States.

I have to say that the farther I got into this story the more impressed I became with these three young boys and how prepared and skilled (perhaps with some luck thrown in) they were in dealing with all that this sailing adventure threw at them. Just getting along with two other people for a month on a small boat at sea could drive many people today crazy.

But those were different times and the boys had very different lives and survival skills than almost any local teenager today. Their teenage years were spent learning how to be self-sufficient and developing practical skills rather than focused on social media and I-phones.

The hammer was about to drop, however. Bud Tara Foote had sent a telegram to a school buddy asking him to send a return telegram verifying that the *Tira* wasn't stolen. Within two days he got a telegram from the New York Times asking the boys to wire back a story of their adventure. It seems that their escapade and location had gotten out.

While they ignored the request from the New York Times, the cat was now out of the bag. To their surprise, they had been on the front page of newspapers not only in California, but across the country. After a month of secrecy and no news of their whereabouts, they had finally been discovered