Book Review: â€˜Hooked on Bajaâ€™

by Ed Zieralski â€“ CNS

At a time when Baja California officials are in the throes of a battle with organized crime, Tom Gatch has written a wonderful book about a place that always has delivered terrific adventures to many of us.

HOOKED - 'Hooked on Baja Fishing,' by Tom Gatch, is informative and delightful. Even non-anglers will enjoy it. CNS Photo. His timing couldn't be better, because if there's ever been a time when we need reminding of what lured us to venture into Baja the first time, it's now. It sure beats the alternative of being scared into not going at all.

"Hooked on Baja," Gatch's book (The Countryman Press, $22), not only shows where and how to fish Mexico's legendary waters, but if you've ever gone there for a fishing, surfing or travel adventure, then this book will remind you of why you should return.

Gatch, who is completing a home in Ensenada, Mexico, writes about Baja for The Log and Baja Times, and has used a lifetime of information he has gleaned in Baja to provide readers with useful tips about a land he loves. It's a well-organized, well-written book that mixes in maps, GPS way points, angling techniques, tackle suggestions, tips for picking a guide and even recipes of authentic Baja dishes. His travel information and advice for buying real estate are must reads in these times and truly the more important sections in his book.

In one chapter, "Important Travel and Activity Information," he writes about buying an SOS sticker for a vehicle that alerts police or any public official that you're a member of Support Our Sindicatura. Gatch quotes Larry "Lorenzo" Biedebach, owner of the Campo Lorenzo Skypark in San Quintin, Baja Norte, who says: "If you plan to drive in Mexico, a donation of only $25 to help support the efforts of Sindicatura will probably be the best investment you've ever made. The Sindicatura is a Mexican government organization formed to fight corruption among public officials - including the cops!"

Biedebach tells Gatch the most important part of the membership is the SOS decal. "When the decal appears on the rear window of your RV, truck or car, any crooked police officer knows that your support of Sindicatura means trouble for him," Biedebach said.

Gatch said decals may be purchased by writing to: Support of Sindicatura, 7349 Millikin Ave., No. 140-234, Rancho Cucamonga, CA, 91730. Or, e-mail them at sosindicatura@hotmail.com.

Gatch's wife took many of the book's pictures, including the cover shot, and they add greatly to the book. Artist Scott Kennedy, who is the official artist for the Newport-to-Ensenada yacht race, illustrated the section on the various fish species found in Baja. There's good information on the fish, and Kennedy's drawings are pure.

In the section "A Taste of Baja," Gatch gives recipes for mussels, shrimp, salsa and fish tacos, including fish tacos San Felipe-style and "South of the Border Beer Batter."

His details about the Baja panga and its origins, along with tips for picking out good guides, is valuable.

Gatch captures people well when he writes personality profiles of several Baja characters, including Gary Graham, who recently was named to the California Outdoors Hall of Fame. His tale from Orvis-certified fly-fishing guide Jeff deBrown is a touching one every guide and angler should read to see one man's quest to catch the fish of his dreams and how important it was for deBrown to deliver it to him. And his story of Baja bush pilot Rick Roessler rescuing two Americans who crashed their plane into the Sea of Cortez near Bahia de Los Angeles is a classic Baja adventure.

But then, the whole book is that way, a reminder of why visiting Baja is still there for the adventurous.

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