

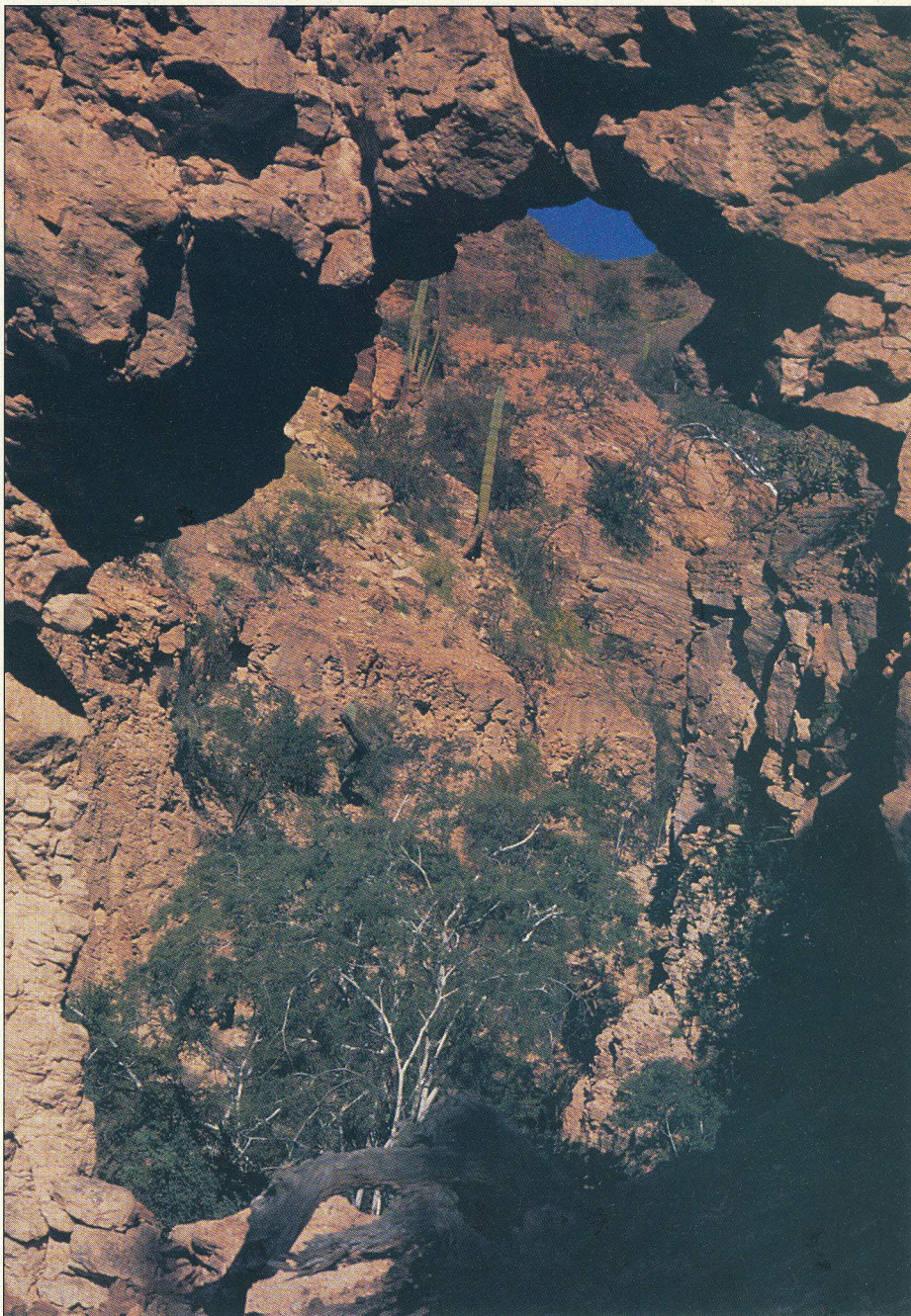
*The Other Side of the Rainbow Sea*  
**EXPLORING THE  
 EAST SIDE OF  
 BAHIA CONCEPCION**

Story and photos by Baja Bob Vinton

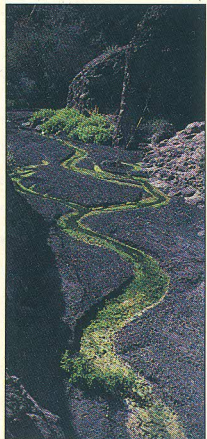
**B**ahía Concepción (also called Conception Bay), is a 25-mile-deep indentation in the coast of the Gulf of California south of Mulegé. It is a glittering, placid, aquamarine inland sea, dotted with islands and separated from the Sea of Cortez by the rugged, mountainous Bahía Concepción Peninsula. This magnificent anomaly of the desert and the sea was used by Sebastián Vizcaíno as a refuge during a fierce storm in 1596, and in 1668, the Spanish explorer Lucenilla reported that on the shores were white-skinned Indians who lived on fruit and shellfish.

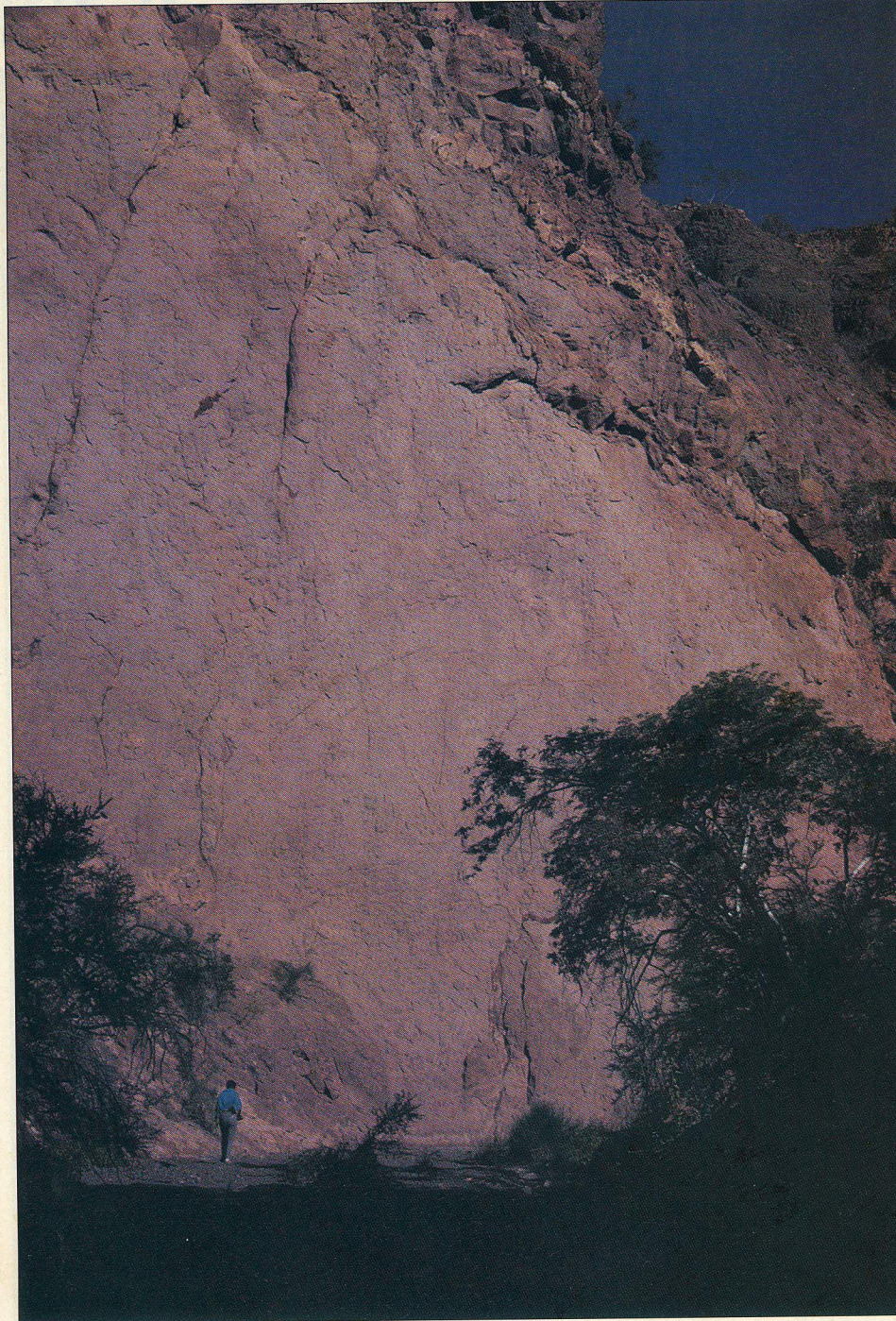
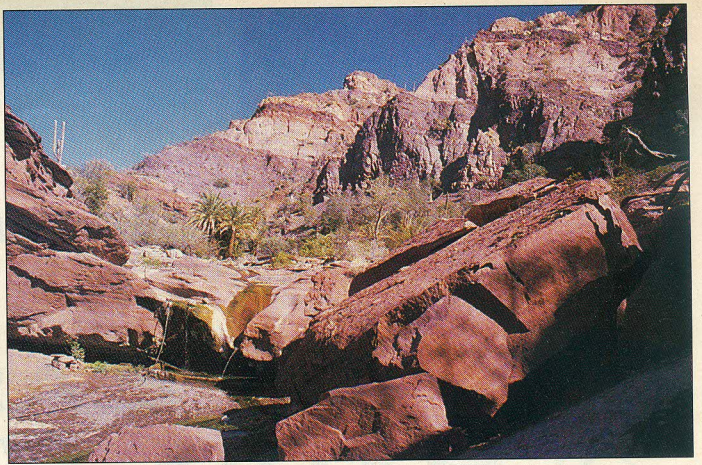
After many trips along the western shore of the inlet, some of my companions and I wondered: "What is on the other side of Bahía Concepción?" In early February of 1991, after unusually heavy rains in November and December, we decided to explore the peninsula.

At the southern end of Bahía Concepción, about 45 miles past Mulegé, we left Highway 1 at kilometer 76. Vehicles making this trip should have high clearance and low gears. While four-wheel drive is not absolutely necessary, it is advisable; don't plan to make the trip in your motor home. After a rain the



Unique rock formations (above) abound in the finger canyons along the eastern shore of Bahía Concepción. Emerald green algae (left) thrives in the El Salto canyon stream bed.





Clockwise from top: Rancho Aguaje; waterfall at El Salto canyon entrance; sheer volcanic conglomerate walls of El Salto canyon.

roads become muddy and impassable.

Hugging the southern shore of the bay past a semi-abandoned, government-run trailer park, the road passes through a fabulous gigantic cardón forest, or cardonal, where turkey vultures roost to dry their wings in the morning sun. This is a good camping area. The 30-mile drive to the tip of the peninsula would make a very long day trip, and there are many places to enjoy along the way. Plan to spend a few days on the journey and you will be amply rewarded.

The dirt road follows the eastern shore of Bahía Concepción across coastal plains with barren salt flats and pebble beaches, which are great for shell collecting. Fish camps are strewn along the shoreline with their enormous piles of scallop shells.

Approximately 15 miles from where we left Highway 1, a side road leads east to Rancho Aguaje, where 70-year-old Patricia Renteria (Baja Patty), one of the colorful power-women of Baja, lived for 10 years. She died in May of this year, but memories of her braided silver hair, turquoise jewelry, artsy-craftsy palm-thatched casita and hospitality survive her, along with her black cat, Durango, and her "Baja Bum" license plate. Rancho Aguaje has one of the few permanent fresh-water springs on the peninsula, and the palms nestled along its narrow gorge are reflected in it. An idyllic spot.

Continuing along the main eastern shore track, two miles past the turnoff to Rancho Aguaje, a road on

