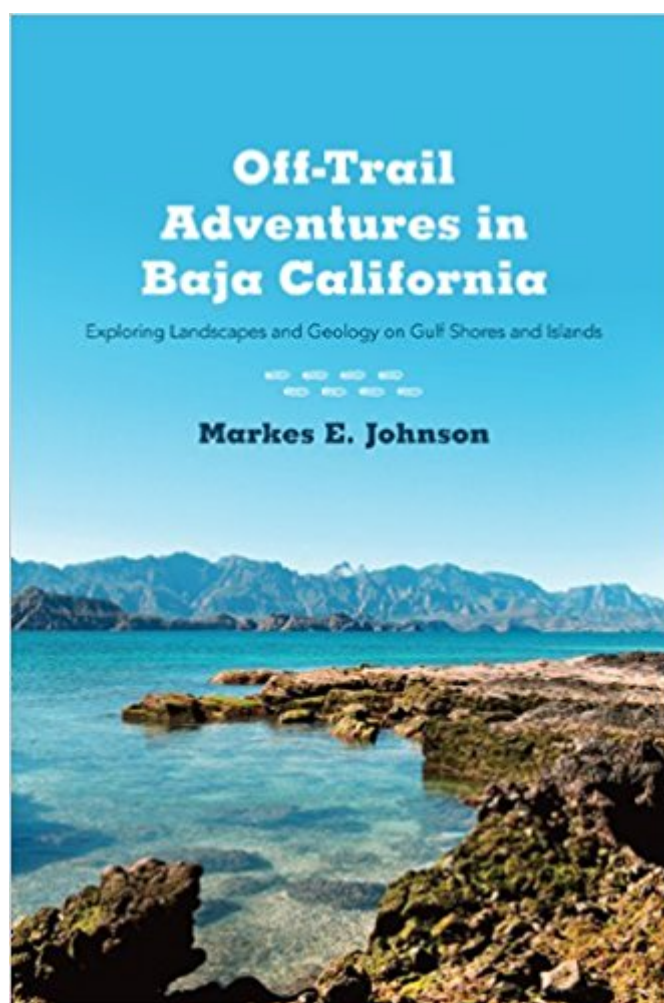


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# Off-Trail Adventures In Baja California: Exploring Landscapes And Geology On Gulf Shores And Islands



## Synopsis

Baja California is one of the Earth's last great wilderness areas that is easily accessible to travelers. Whether you enter from the United States to the north or from Cabo San Lucas to the south, it doesn't take long to find yourself passing through a unique desert ecosystem of islands and land bound by the Pacific Ocean on the west and the Gulf of California on the east. But where, you might ask, can you go to best experience the physical majesty of Baja California? This book holds the answer. *Off-Trail Adventures in Baja California* describes and maps and illustrates nine hikes along outcrops on islands and peninsular shores where geography, geology, and ecology meet in singular ways. Each spot tells a story about the nature of the place—the cumulative effects of millions of years of natural forces at work. During the course of his long teaching career, Mark E. Johnson has hiked much of Baja California, often with students in tow. He brings a lifetime of study to his simple descriptions of the stories that are revealed by looking closely at natural phenomena framed by rocks and fossils. This hiking guide offers a wealth of stories that seem to encompass everything, and can clearly communicate Johnson's deep understanding of how our planet's ecosystems function. Whether you like to hike with your boots on or from the comfort of your favorite chair, this book is a must-have for anyone who has visited or hopes to visit Baja California's Gulf Coast.

## Book Information

Paperback: 272 pages

Publisher: University of Arizona Press; 2 edition (March 13, 2014)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0816521301

ISBN-13: 978-0816521302

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.7 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 12 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 stars 9 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #125,478 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #34 in Books > Travel > Mexico > General #122 in Books > Sports & Outdoors > Hunting & Fishing > Fishing #234 in Books > Science & Math > Earth Sciences > Geology

## Customer Reviews

In the vein of John McPhee's popular geology books, Richard C. Brusca, editor of *The Gulf of California: Biodiversity and Conservation* and author of *Common Intertidal Invertebrates of*

the Gulf of California. With prose like Joseph Wood Krutch, the technical aspects of Ed Ricketts, the sleuthing of Sherlock Holmes, and the adventure of Indiana Jones, it is my guess that *Off-Trail Adventures in Baja California* could be a very widely read natural science publication like Norman Roberts's book on Baja plants, or some of Peterson's bird books. "Norman K. Christie. As informative as any field guide, yet as entertaining as any adventure novel." *Journal of Coastal Research* "It is a quintessence of passion to the Earth sciences, and, thus, this is an inspired and inspiring book, which stimulates thinking and enjoying the wonders of nature." *Zentralblatt*

Markes E. Johnson is the Charles L. MacMillan Professor of Natural Science, Emeritus, at Williams College in Williamstown, Massachusetts. He is the author of *Discovering the Geology of Baja California: Six Hikes on the Southern Gulf Coast (Arizona)*, and co-editor of *Atlas of Coastal Ecosystems in the Western Gulf of California: Tracking Limestone Deposits on the Margin of a Young Sea (Arizona)*.

I saved reading this book until I was a couple days into a sea-kayak trip from Loreto to Las Paz. I've been lucky enough to have had my fair share of adventures in Baja and, as anyone who has traveled in Baja can attest, you cannot travel far without coming face to face with geology. Paddling along spectacular sea cliffs for 10 days didn't hurt. As it was, I read the book in the afternoons after paddling while clinging to shade on wild and remote beaches, and I just loved it. Part was reminiscing about various trips of my own and comparing notes, and part of it was enjoying the exploration and discovery process that Professor Johnson has been going through over the last two decades. While the book does give the practical information necessary to see the geological places that it discusses, I wouldn't view the book as a field guide any more than I would view Annie Dillard's work as a field guide to Tinker Creek. It is a close and careful look at the rocks and fossils and then it walks you through the thought and discovery process that allows the geologic details of the area to be unraveled. It was fun to go along with Johnson on his journeys, even while I had only passing interest in which areas had ancient upwelling and which were ancient bays (I do like fossil reefs, however). Also, I have no particular plans to seek out the spots he writes about, or do the described hikes, but this doesn't diminish the fun about reading about them. Funny enough, my favorite chapter was one where I had no connection, and in which not much happened. It was the hike across rugged terrain to distant dunes to see if they were made of wind blown shells. There were many false starts through myriad dirt tracks and arroyos and

only through perseverance did they finally reach the obscure, out of the way, and not all that tall dunes. It was a science quest and exploration in a very small but also very pure way. The kicker was that the dune turned out not to be marine sediment at all. But rather than taking this as a colossal failure, in the true spirit of science it opened up unexpected new lines of thought and ultimately a new view of ice age climate in the area. There are many natural history books that look in detail at the plants and animals of Baja or anywhere for that matter, but there are few that give the same attention to the rocks and fossils. This book does that, and provides a clear view into Baja's layout and history. I recommend it thoroughly for anyone who has explored in Baja and wondered about the rocks, and anyone who really wants to understand how field geology is done.

This is a great little book about a part of the world where little has been written about the geology and natural history. Markes Johnson is a retired college professor and it is clear he knows how to teach (his students were lucky to have him as a teacher!). The writing style is outgoing and the book is written as if your good friend is taking you on a personal tour of the area. The illustrations are great and very complementary to the text. As a geologist myself, I appreciate the care with which the book is written (from a technical standpoint) and I have actually cited it in my own research. Having said that, however, the book is certainly not TOO technical or specialized--a visitor to Baja California who has any minimum amount of curiosity about how the landscape and biota evolved there will find this book a delight. Highly recommended!

Good piece of academic geological work written in a conversational, anecdotal style. Not what I was thinking it was. Not an "off trail" guide to Baja.

Markes Johnson knows more about the geology of Baja than just about anyone else. I have been fortunate enough to be in the field with Dr. Johnson in the Punta Chivato area of Baja California Sur, and his vast knowledge and enthusiasm about the area comes through very well in this wonderful book! A must buy if you plan to travel to the areas detailed in the book. Highly recommended!

An exceptional read that unravels many mysteries of Baja geology while also capturing the essence of the history and people of the Peninsula -- and the spiritual satisfaction and enlightenment that comes with spending time in nature.

Seems too technical at times but is giving me ideas for hikes and explorations over the next 2 months.

Well written by a man that truly loves Baja, but best for anyone that is already interested in geology. Recommended for frequent Baja travelers.

This is one of the best books I've read on Baja, or on natural history in general. Readers are taken into the beautiful and remote back country of Baja California to learn about animals, plants and geology through the eyes (and mind) of a first-rate naturalist. Follow the author's mind as he recognizes curious patterns in nature, then sets out to investigate and understand them. Johnson is one of the top Baja geologists working today, and his field studies on this enchanted peninsula are done in collaboration with students and two other top geologists, Jorge Ledesma-Vázquez and David Backus. Follow these scientists through the land of Boojums and stromatolites as they wind their way down the peninsula. This wonderful little book is a most enjoyable read. And you'll learn a lot about geology and natural history along the way.

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