

The California Rock Art Foundation is pleased to announce limited openings on the New Moon Great Murals Pack Trip in Baja, Mexico. In collaboration with our partners at Saddling South, we have organized an extraordinary trip into the remote mountains of the Sierra de San Francisco – the heart of the Great Murals Rock Painting Tradition. Our expedition seeks to reach Cueva de la Serpiente (Cave of the Serpent), Mono Alto and Super-nova, three of the most significant sites in the region.



Dates: March 6 - 12, 2019: 7 Days

Meeting location, time: Loreto, Mexico, exact location/time TBA

Cost per person: \$2500; food and tent lodging included

Discount for CRAF members / Native Americans / Students? None Available

Route and Itinerary (subject to change):

March 6 (Day 1) – We will meet you at the airport/hotel in Loreto and take a Taxi van to Santa Martha. A 4-hour drive through beautiful desert scenery, alongside the scalloped beaches of Bahía Concepción, and past the majestic volcano Las Tres Virgenes will take us to the small village of San Ignacio for a short break to visit the mission, the plaza, and enjoy the small-town colonial atmosphere.

Another 2 hours into the valley of Ranchería Santa Martha, where we will stay the night and where our trail and cave adventure begins. We'll meet the mules and cowboys and soon be on the trail to visit world famous indigenous art. Camping overnight tonight (we supply tents, and all meals).

March 7-9 (Days 2 - 4) – Ride mules over the mountain and into Parral Canyon. A centrally located base camp allows us access to Serpiente, Mono Alto and Super-nova, three of the most visited sites in this arroyo. On day five we go back over the ridge-tops to Santa Martha and overnight near the small town of Mulegé.

March 10 (Day 5) – Ride back to Santa Martha a.m., visit Palmarito, hotel overnight Mulegé Serenidad.

March 11 (Day 6) - Today we explore a petroglyph site, Piedras Pintas and then return to Loreto. Overnight at Hotel Oasis tonight and an end of trip meal on the patio waterfront.

March 12 (Day 7) - Breakfast/lunch on your own, we will arrange for your return to the Loreto airport at mid-day. Buen Viaje!

General Information

The new moon occurs on March 6th and so we are expecting to have a few very dark nights with exceptional views of the sky and Milky Way. This will also make ideal lighting conditions for night photography. We will be riding mules through rugged country. Although not required, you may consider purchasing chaps or half chaps, as the mules descend trails lined with tall cacti.

All gear will be loaded onto burros, so please pack light and compact. Try and limit your total gear to two medium sized duffle bags. If you anticipate bringing extra gear such as bulky camera equipment, we may be able to arrange additional burros to carry the load. Saddle bags will be provided in which you can store your personal gear (water, snacks, clothing, camera) during the day while riding on the trail. I don't recommend wearing a backpack while riding, but that is a personal preference. Saddling South will provide REI Half Dome (2 person) tents for those who do not wish to bring their own.

Saddling South (<https://www.saddlingsouth.com/>), a small Baja ecotour company based out for Loreto, will be handling all travel arrangements. We will be escorted by local cowboys, 'vaqueros', who are certified through INAH (The Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia). These men are responsible for the pack animals, keeping the group safe, and protecting the archaeological resources. The group will also be joined by Saddling South guides who will act as translators and cooks. California Rock Art Foundation board members Ron Smith and Ryan Gerstner will accompany the group and field discussions regarding history of the Cochimi, symbolism within the Great Murals, and the archaeology of the area.

Are food and lodging included? Yes, all meals and snacks are included in the price. Please specify if you have any dietary restrictions and we may be able to cater to you. Feel free to bring your own libations (wine, tequila, etc.) and if you would like to bring special trail snacks along, please do. We do not have quality protein bars / energy bars in Mexico, so please consider bringing a few personal trail snacks for the saddle bags. Other snacks and drink can be picked up at grocery stores in Loreto. For the most part, the menu will consist traditional Mexican dishes prepared in the field. Coffee and breakfast will be prepared in the morning, with snacks/light lunch during the heat of the day, and a hearty dinner each evening by the campfire. Meals on travel days at restaurants, and meals on the pack trip into the canyon.

What should they expect and / or be aware of before they go and while there? March weather should be 70s to 80s during the day and 40's to 50's at night. But as we all know, the weather can be rather unpredictable, so we should prepare for extremes. Our party will be led by a long line of burro's, which haul the kitchen – (stove, fuel, tables, chairs, pots/pans, etc.), food, water, camping supplies, and all our personal gear. We will follow on mules – and travel caravan style on steep meandering canyon trails with breathtaking views of the vistas and palm oases. Never ridden a horse/mule? No problem! The mules know the route well, and you will quickly adopt proper form and be a natural in no time!

Required Gear

Sleeping Bag – 50 deg min (available upon request)
Sleeping Pad – small, Therm-a-Rest, (available upon request)
Towel
Toiletries – biodegradable soap
Clothes for 6 days – pack extra light!
Rain Jacket
Sweatshirt
Hiking Boots
Trekking Poles
Water Bottles
Hat – w/ brim
Sunscreen
Sunglasses
Headlamp / Flashlight
Medication (bring in original prescription bottle to avoid seizure at Customs)

Optional/Other

Personal Tent – Small (2 person tents are provided)
Hammock – can substitute for tent
Notebook and Pen
Binoculars
Toilet Paper, trowel
Small Musical Instrument
Chaps/half-chaps
Bandana

NARRATIVE OF TWO SITES WE WILL VISIT

Palmarito

The Cuesta del Palmarito site was known for centuries to missionaries and travelers. During both prehistoric and mission periods, major trails passed within easy view of this cave's great arched entrance - which probably made it the most visited of all Great Mural locations. In its highest row of paintings, a collection of human figures displays unusually varied headdresses and decorations. Some appear clothed, a possibility so welcome to the decorous Jesuits that it contributed to their belief that the region had once been populated by a more civilized people.

Serpentine

At Cueva de la Serpiente, can be found the most extraordinary composition in the Great Mural area. This 26-foot-long panel was apparently painted by one artist. No other site displays fanciful creatures like these deer-headed serpents, nor do others show large groups of interrelated figures like those clustering around the sinuous body of the snake-monster on the right. As if to heighten the mystery of this unique conception, the smaller figures do closely resemble the work of Painters at other sites. The photograph of the area between the serpents shows the rough surface on which this great work was rendered - and attests to the fidelity of Joanne Crosby's recreation of the entire panel.

The composition of the work, when seen close at hand, is striking and full of fascinating details. A serpentine figure forms the literal spine of an assemblage fleshed out with over 50 doll-like human and animal figures. The sinuous form of the serpent and these lesser bodies were conceived and executed as a unit. The small figures do not interfere with the movement of the large one; indeed, their placement creates an odd, rocking effect that enhances the apparent weaving of the serpent.

The Serpent Cave - Cueva de la Serpiente falls within the Archaic Great Murals Rock Art tradition, found in the central sierras of the Baja California Peninsula: San Borja, San Juan, San Francisco and Guadalupe. The two deer-headed serpents of Cueva de la Serpiente on the Baja California peninsula are spectacular and practically unique.

Today, the right-hand one is complete, with deer-like ears and antlers and a long banded body. The left-hand one has lasted less well and only the head is preserved; the rest of the serpent was painted on a section of rock that fell away. The mural is almost 8 meters wide, with more than 50 diminutive human and animal figures.

During his expeditions in the 1970's Harry W. Crosby was overwhelmed by the cave painting of Cueva de la Serpiente; an extraordinary composition that appeared to be painted by one artist. He claimed that no other site displayed such 'fanciful' creatures or such an interrelated theme. Despite the human and deer motifs resembling the other cave painting sites in Baja California, Cueva de la Serpiente was very individual phenomenon.