

Gym Rat Rantings

by Bob Ring

Fulfilling a Dream in Mexico

One hundred and sixty years ago my great-grandfather Eugene Ring was forced to make an unplanned trek across southern Mexico's Isthmus of Tehuantepec after being abandoned by his Panama-bound ship while he and nine others were ashore foraging for food and water.

Last month - for five wonderful days - Pat and I relived Eugene's adventure. Our driver Pablo and his wife Araceli guided us close to Eugene's path from Salina Cruz on the Pacific coast to Veracruz on the Gulf coast. All our research and planning paid off – we were able to locate and visit most of the places that Eugene described in his California Gold Rush memoir.

We appreciate the country that Eugene struggled through on foot, horseback, and canoe – the rocky, chaparral-fenced beaches; the green hills and mountain passes; the lush jungles; and the flowering plants and trees of many colors. But for us, the highlight was rediscovering the sights, particularly churches, like this one in El Barrio that captivated Eugene so many years ago.

We found the people of the Isthmus (mostly indigenous Zapotecs) to be friendly and helpful, but few spoke any English and there are very few tourists. Thankfully our guide Pablo is fluently bilingual and was able to help us with everything from hotels to restaurant menus.

It was fascinating to watch Pablo successfully wend through the towns and villages to sites we visited. It was “navigation by asking.” He would just ask directions from people at the side of the road.

Sometimes getting around by car was not that easy. The larger cities like Salina Cruz, Tehuantepec, and Veracruz were crammed with busy traffic.



In small towns, speed bumps (called topes) effectively control traffic. These speed bumps come in bunches, appear to be everywhere, and can really shake things up if you don't slow down. Frequent speed bumps combined with convoys of huge two-section trucks, made for a high-tension ride on the only cross-Isthmus road. Thank goodness I wasn't driving!

Pat kept busy filling a notebook with our impressions of the sites we visited and other subjects of interest such as plants, animals, hotels, meals, public transportation, local driver habits, and our education in Mexican culture.

It's going to take an entire book to adequately describe this family-history adventure!