

The Resurrection of Marina de La Paz

It was all over by 10AM that Monday, last September 22. I can still remember the sounds of the docks splintering and fiberglass hulls gnashing against each other and that sick feeling you get in your gut as you look at the remains of your friends' boats. Hurricane Marty had passed directly over La Paz wrecking havoc on the marine community.



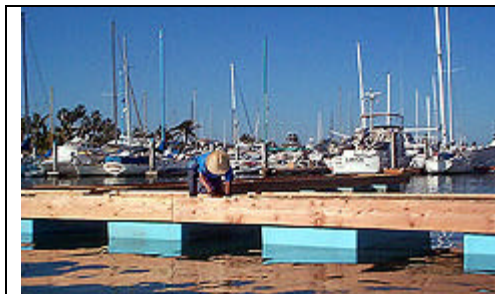
In the pre-dawn hours the wind and waves had been from the NNE as Marty approached, battering against the outer docks, already abused by hurricane Ignacio three weeks before. With wind speeds clocked near 100 mph, several boats had broken loose and had been pressed

into clusters against the more southerly docks, pilings and other boats. At 8AM frantic efforts ensued during the relative calm of the eye, to secure lines, re-anchor or in some cases; abandon ship. But unlike little brother Ignacio which gave us 6 hours of calm in the eye, Marty let up for only about 20 minutes. That was simply not enough time.



Looking out from the Marina office the construction on the new finger of B dock can be seen in front of the crane.

I remember standing on the breakwater as the southern eye wall approached. For those readers who have not experienced the eye of a hurricane I will explain. As a storm approaches the intensity builds and the barometer falls over hours or days, leading to a crescendo of rain and wind. Then, in the period of minute or two, it stops. In the eye, the sun shines and the breeze is gentle. When the trailing edge of the eye comes, you understand the term "eye wall" as you can literally "see it coming". In less than a minute the weather goes from calm to a howling gale of horizontal rain and maximum winds in the opposite direction as before. It was the trailing side of the hurricane that wrought the destruction on Marina de La Paz.



Assembling the new docks in place on the new central finger

The gaggle of boats that had been pressed southward, moved north like a giant bowling ball smashing pilings, docks, boats and dreams in its path. By that afternoon the cleanup and repairs had begun. Within a month most of the boats had been floated for repair or salvage and Marina de La Paz was left with a gaping hole in the middle with what became known as "Isla Marty", the dozen or so slips isolated at the end of A dock and the slips landside.

But that was nearly seven months ago. Today a new marina is blooming where September's disaster took place. Almost all of the dock pilings have been driven and the workers tow another new section

of dock into place daily. The process began days after the hurricane with the marina crew replacing piles with a small derrick and securing the existing docks. Several vessels needed to be floated, the last of which still rests on the bottom in front of the marina to where it was towed in January making way for the rebuilding.

In late February, a large construction crane was placed on a pair of huge pontoons for placing the new pilings. Watching the process evolve as I did, the coagulation of the “machine” for the rebuilding was impressive enough. Shore crews laid up the fiberglass floats and built dock segments which were towed out and placed by the work pangas. The huge crane first removed the damaged piles then pressed new piles in with a water drill. Shortly, “Isla Marty” was reconnected to shore and the plumbers and electricians set to work restoring services to A dock.



Another new section of dock is towed into position through the entrance to MDLP

Today, the work within the marina is nearly complete for the crane. Temporary wood deck docks just about complete the new layout of the marina. Electricians and plumbers are fitting the docks with power, phone and cable, a process that should be complete by late May or early June. The temporary wood decks will be replaced with hardwood or synthetic materials over the summer. New access ramps have been installed for the A, B and dingy docks already.



The crane on the floating platform used in construction. (click to enlarge)

The marina will have a new layout when completed too. Previously, A dock looked like a backwards F. The mid-finger, extending southward where most of the hurricane carnage took place, will not be replaced. Instead, the jut from B dock will be extended into the center of the marina, reducing the number of cross current slips and improving the width between quays for better docking.

The biggest improvement is yet to come, says owner Mac Schroyer. Construction of a break in front of the marina is scheduled to begin this summer. Engineers from Long Beach, California are working with Marina De La Paz and harbor authorities to design a break that will be effective, affordable and minimize impact on the natural currents in the ensenada de La Paz. With any luck, it will prevent another disaster like this past season.

The desire to see Marina de La Paz back online extends beyond the marine community. The lack of the usual cruising crowd this past winter has only begun to be felt in the La Paz business community. Although no longer a significant percentage of the Baja economy, many businesses that catered to the cruisers have already succumbed to the third slow season since 9/11. (See The End of Paradise) The money earned by many La Paz businesses during the winter months carries them through the hot, tourist free summer. The real fall-out may yet occur in July and August.

I would like to thank Mac, Mary and Neil Schroyer for their constant flow of information to the BajaInsider. We look forward to toasting the completion of the project later this summer and to welcoming new cruisers to the resurrected Marina de La Paz this fall. 🌵

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