

Potentialities of a cross-border hiking route in Baja California, Mexico

Potencialidades de una ruta transfronteriza de senderismo en Baja California, México

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Abstract

The proposal organization of an open hiking trail in Baja California (BC) is proposed to articulate the different particular offers of tourism, some linked to the United States, within the network of rural roads that link BC from La Rumorosa, until arrival at Valle de Guadalupe. It is assumed that it is the transboundary context that generates sources of demand, but also the growing influence of the new paradigms that promote sustainable regional development. The definition of the route is in a qualitative-descriptive approach with different data collection instruments, such as routes, measurements and questionnaires. At least five spaces that are serving foreign and border populations were detected (El Topo, El Sausalito, Bethel, Escuela de Energía Solar, La Ponderosa), which by promoting them within an articulated scheme of social business, can generate a dynamic of regional growth.

Keywords: hiking tourist route, cross-border adventure tourism, sustainable development, trekking.

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Resumen

Se propone la organización de una ruta abierta de senderismo en Baja California (BC) que articula las distintas ofertas particulares, algunas vinculadas a Estados Unidos, dentro de la red de caminos rurales que unen a BC desde el pie de La Rumorosa, hasta la llegada al Valle de Guadalupe. Se asume que es el contexto transfronterizo el que genera fuentes de demanda, pero también la creciente influencia de los nuevos paradigmas que promueven

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un desarrollo regional sustentable. La definición de la ruta se basa en un enfoque descriptivo-cualitativo con diferentes instrumentos de recolección de datos, como recorridos, mediciones y cuestionarios. Se detectaron al menos cinco espacios que están atendiendo población extranjera y fronteriza (El Topo, El Sausalito, Bethel, Escuela de Energía Solar, La Ponderosa), cuya promoción dentro de un esquema articulado de negocios sociales puede generar una dinámica de crecimiento regional.

Palabras clave: ruta turística de sendero, turismo de aventura transfronterizo, desarrollo sustentable, senderismo.

Introduction

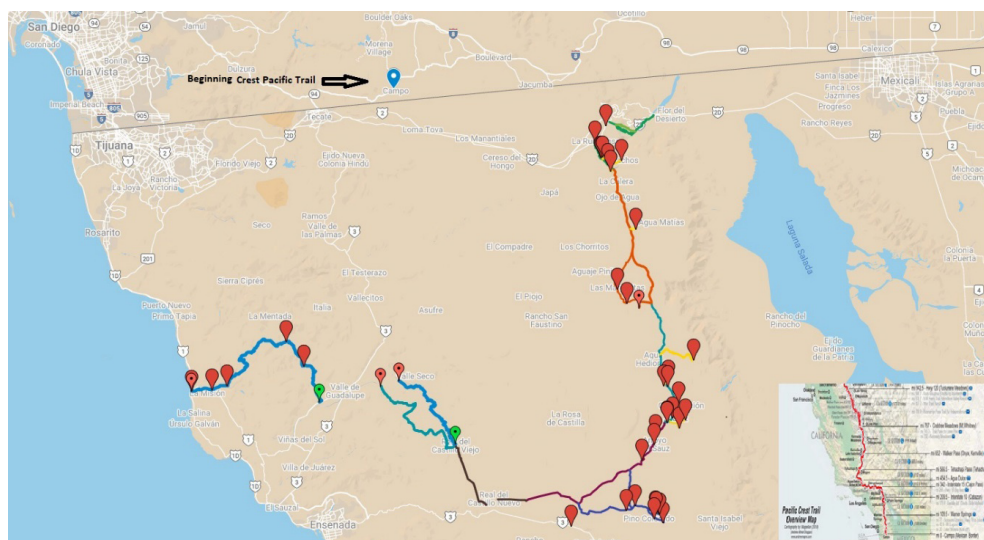
One of the greatest economic impacts of the health emergency generated by COVID-19 has been observed in the tourism sector in all its forms at the international level. At the level of border tourism, despite significant growth until 2019 and the postponement of large investment plans, the economic crisis in this sector as a result of the pandemic has caused a shift to more modest projections in traditional tourism (Madrid, 2020). However, 25% of the projections in emerging economies for 2030 were associated with the growing demand for tourism in search of experiences that involve greater contact with nature and the community and greater environmental, economic and social sustainability (IPK, 2013; Santarém et al., 2015).

In Mexico, tourism directly generates 9% of the gross domestic product (GDP) and indirectly generates another 5%; it is an important source of jobs, accounting for 7.3% of the employed population. The states along the northern border contribute 14.8% of the national tourism GDP, with enormous growth potential due to their proximity to the southern states of the United States, especially when taking into account the extraordinary number of trips made by their inhabitants (Madrid, 2020). Although there is still a strong concentration in sun and beach tourism, other types of attractive and sustainable tourism products are emerging in the cultural, business, ecotourism, adventure, health and sports areas (Sectur, 2015), whose demand is increasing. In fact, 26% of international outings from Latin America, North America and Europe could be considered adventure outings (Xola Adventure Industry Consultants, 2009).

In Baja California (BC), tourism generates 11% of the total state GDP and 8% of jobs and contributes directly to various productive sectors, such as construction, commerce, transportation and medical services (Gobierno del Estado de Baja California, 2015; Secretaría de Infraestructura y Desarrollo Urbano, 2013). For some time, BC has stood out in international and cross-border adventure tourism due to the growing demand for unknown destinations, i.e., those little developed with unexploited environmental surroundings and that are in protected natural areas (Bringas et al., 2000). The aim of this type of tourism is to promote travel through recreational activities associated with contact with nature and the cultural expressions of communities, respecting the heritage of the destination (Ibáñez & Rodríguez-Villalobos, 2012). In turn, this type of tourism allows tourists to improve their physical condition and improve their emotional state in the face of challenges imposed by nature and by themselves (Sectur, 2015).

The border is a space of opportunities for the development of new products that allow the consolidation of the sector with a perspective of integral regional development (Bringas, 2004, De Oliveira-Matos et al., 2015). However, in BC, a public policy has not been developed to promote this type of activity as a development strategy for rural areas. Despite this, options for adventure tourism products have been developed in an atomized manner, promoted mainly by individuals to meet, associated with their lifestyle, a growing demand for local and cross-border tourism. This cross-border demand is strongly associated with the culture of trekking on the other side of the border, developed around the San Diego River and the different hiking areas in the Cleveland National Reserve. However, it is the famous Pacific Crest Trail, which begins in Campo in Tecate, California, and extends to the border with Canada that generates the greatest influence and interest in adventure tourism spaces in the municipality of Tecate in BC (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Locations of the proposed route and the Pacific Crest Trail



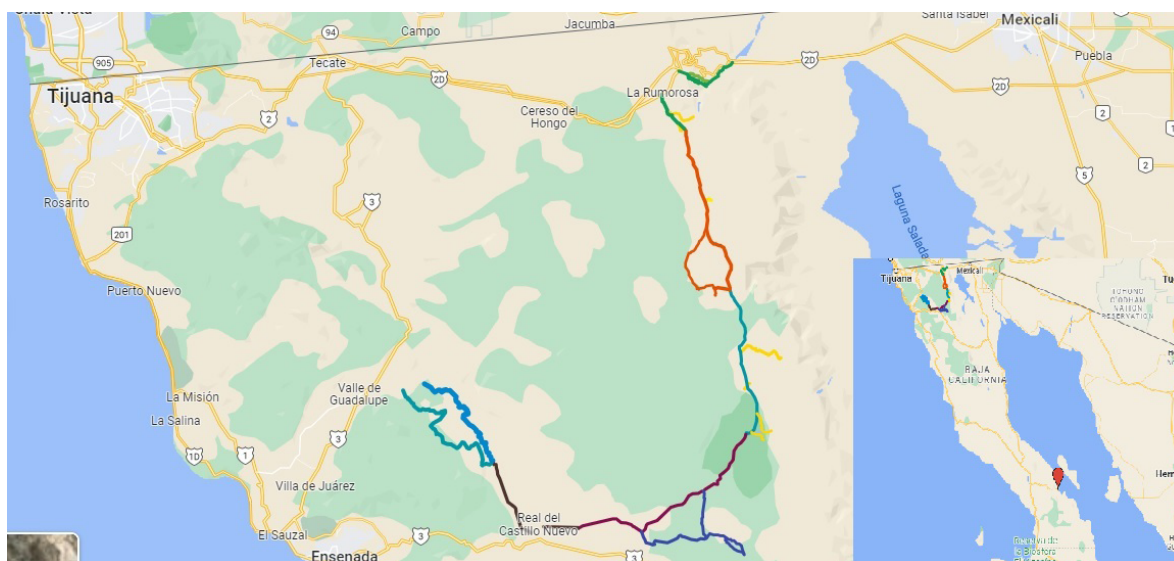
Source: authors with project information

In BC, the municipalities of Tecate and Ensenada are classified as arid zones, with great water scarcity, which limits the productivity of agricultural activities and alters the conditions for vegetation and forest exploitation (Tarango Arámbula, 2005). Given this, rural development programs have been created in arid areas that support adventure tourism activities, thereby strengthening the capacity of rural families to improve their economic situation. Adventure tourism helps to sustain local economies by generating development options for populations with greater backwardness or vulnerability, at the same time avoiding the environmental degradation of the areas in which it is developed. This tourism type also positively transforms the people involved because by creating local investment opportunities, it takes advantage of existing local

capacities to provide different services in the face of growing demand. This opens the possibility for social business initiatives linked to the valuation of natural resources and their conservation (Honey & Gilpin, 2009). In this context, trail tourism can assume the role of as a primary or secondary tourism product and can motivate visitors to extend their stay to enjoy the route and its surroundings. In addition, its start-up and operation require a relatively low investment because trails are fundamentally based on natural and cultural resources (De Oliveira-Matos et al., 2017).

In sum, the objective of the present work is to formalize the plans for an open hiking route in BC that takes advantage of different particular opportunities within the network of rural roads that connect BC from the foot of La Rumorosa to Valle de Guadalupe. This tourism options would allow a greater connection with the routes and trails on the border of California (Figure 2).

Figure 2. General proposed route



Source: authors based on field work and Google Maps

Literature review

Various regions have sought to integrate their local economy into global circuits using tourist service activities as an option for economic development based on the creation of tourism products with unique characteristics (López, 2011; Rubio, 2011). Border tourism in developing countries has *been* exploited through community tourism (Briedenhann & Wickens, 2004; Moral et al., 2016), considering natural resources in their social context to maintain their qualities and generate social benefits derived from both their commercialization in the market and cooperation between

participants with individual initiatives (Verduzco, 2010). The economic value created depends on the market where the destinations and the experiences sought by visitors meet. Consequently, the commercial success of a natural tourist destination depends on the efficiency with which the local organizational capacities are designed as a product, the business vision of the different participants and the effectiveness of public policies to promote the activity. In addition, the border paradox is taken advantage of, tending to disappear and facilitate relations on both sides because a large part of these relationships are developed thanks to the persistence of economic, administrative and legal differences generated by the very existence of the border (Trillo Santamaría & Lois González, 2011).

The key variables in the development of a region that undertakes a tourism project are business development, tourist behavior and attitude of the host population (Blanco & Grupo Técnico de Apoyo del Prodar-ITCA, 2008). Each of these variables evolves through several phases of development (Borma, 2012). However, the main triggering agent is the appearance of business initiatives with a tourist offer that is consolidated with multiplication, a greater knowledge and appreciation of tourists and the involvement of the local population. All this ensures that existing local businesses are viable and that their activity is connected to the existing rural identity, resources and capabilities (Bosworth, 2012). Therefore, rural businesses implicitly assume, in their business plan, the opportunities and challenges of their environment *and* the local and cross-border networks that allow exchange between them because they are the actions of the actors involved in the context of the border, i.e., those that generate cross-border relations. The population of Mexican origin residing in the United States represents an important segment of the border tourism market and should be considered for understanding and planning any tourism product when identifying a space for interaction between populations of Mexican or Latino descent (Bringas Rábago, 2004). Destinations must reflect consumer preferences and satisfy demand; parallel to the evolution of the world economy, there are differences in cross-border tourism movements (Kozak & Buhalis, 2019).

Trekking as a form of mild or sustainable tourism is an important component of development strategies for rural regions in various parts of the world and can be used as a means of linking borders. The rural context generates a close relationship between business initiatives and community life because they influence each other (Steiner & Atterton, 2015). Although trekking is predominantly classified as a physical activity, it is also an important recreational and leisure activity because there are perfectly identified networks of traditional roads and trails (De Oliveira-Matos et al., 2015). This generates high development opportunities (Steinerowska, 2009) because food, lodging and guide services are offered by businesses or family businesses of people with a rural lifestyle, generating a sustainable activity in the market that provides income to maintain a lifestyle because rural families adapt entrepreneurship to their way of life (Mungaray-Lagarda et al., 2020; Peters et al., 2009). In general, they are not profit-oriented businesses (Yunus, 2010), do not require high professional or financial skills and easily adapt to a family business model, where family members and their knowledge of rural life are the most valuable assets. However, these microbusinesses

face multiple challenges associated with signage and access, a small and dispersed clientele, limited human resources, large distances to supply centers, small settlements, weak or nonexistent infrastructure and security and little management capacity (Fyall & Garrod, 1997).

Economic activity, under the figure of social enterprise, offers these family businesses alternatives for success related to a lifestyle of “voluntary exclusion,” where individuals align their business activity to a simple lifestyle that prioritizes sustainable social or personal goals over commercial goals (Morrison, 2006), with services in harmony with nature, outdoor activities appropriate for weather seasons, and aesthetic attractions at particular geographical locations, without the stress that characterizes urban life.

Among the most exploited modalities of adventure tourism is the tourist route or trail, which is understood as a route that consists of a defined itinerary, connected by several sites of interest, composed of cultural or natural attractions that are organized around a type of activity (Brazil Marques & Santos, 2014). The route depends on multiple factors, such as the regional tourism context, focal and complementary attractions and the development of infrastructure and services. This means that tourism management varies between areas, depending on the institutional capacities and existing resources in each area (Flognfeldt, 2005).

A route can be seen as a closed system of the tourism environment, composed of various components: people in a geographic area with the desire and ability to participate; attractions and activities for users; services and facilities for users; and information and guidance for users (Navalón-García, 2014). The routes can be thematic, historical and natural, classified based on difficulty or habitat diversity, whose creation is due to a proliferation of walking as an activity. Edensor (2000) classifies these routes into two types: short distance, which follow a natural trail, and hikers go to markers along the route to reach points of interest; and long-distance trails, which are meticulously covered in guides, both by the reproduction of large-scale maps that cover each part of the walk and by detailed instructions on how to follow the trail. These guides tend to divide a walk into sections, with logical places to start and end each day's walk, with the inclusion of points of particular interest.

Svarstad (2010) places the groups that practice trekking in two extremes. In the first are those who seek recreation and relaxation, and therefore, their activities focus on walking, wandering, roaming, casual walking and participating in diverse groups focused on relaxing and socializing. In the second are those who participate in marching, trekking, hiking, hill walking, yomping and peak bagging, all exhausting, rigorous and challenging activities that require planning.

To develop a competitive trekking strategy requires the creation and marking of routes to guide users, the valuation of heritage as a tourism strategy, the training of the local population so that they can be integrated into the tourism chain, and investment in safety and basic infrastructure and in the promotion and development of a destination image (De Oliveira-Matos et al., 2017).

Methodology

The proposed hiking route is designed based on a descriptive-qualitative approach. Using different data collection instruments during fieldwork, for example, tours, measurements, interviews, questionnaires and photographs, the potential for adventure was assessed for different resources: natural, which can be used to make an area more attractive; human, related to the ability of residents to provide tourism services; business, with the ability to manage businesses and income; and community members, through their cooperation networks.

On the basis of defining trekking as an important aspect of adventure tourism, a model of supply was defined based on a model developed on the other side of the border and the conceptions of sustainable development. This was defined in order to make the most of the resources of the area as well as the productive, organizational and innovative dynamics of each place.

The fieldwork allowed the confirmation of the adventure tourism potential in the area based on the following criteria. For natural resources, all areas related to environmental aspects that could make an area more attractive were considered. For business resources, a census was carried out among the ranches along the route that provide some service to determine their installed and potential capacities. For this, a questionnaire was applied that allowed the identification and classification of enterprises, their installed capacities and their relationships with other enterprises in the area as well as with other companies and clients in the United States.

The measurements of distances and coordinates were made using the Global Positioning System (GPS) along a route made by four researchers to record the conditions along the route and the maintenance needs of the roads, access roads and signage. This made it possible to construct sketches with confirmed measurements and to suggest support or service points where the distances for trekking were considered. Finally, all the information was collated in a catalog with potential tourist offerings in the area, including ranches and natural, cultural, and historical attractions.

The proposed product considers walking or trekking as the central activity because it generates a lower impact on the environment; furthermore, because visitor stays are longer in such environments, it can generate a greater demand for services. This prioritizes natural resources in the development process, in economic and social dynamics, in the behavior of people and in the relationships between actors and the natural environment.




To collect information, two trips were made along the route: the first trip involved a 5-day trek, which allowed us to become familiar with the route, mark the sections and take notes on sites of interest. The second, also a 5-day trek, allowed us to make a census of the sites that offer different tourist services or have the potential to do so, so as to become familiar with their forms of organization, their business concepts, their expectations and, above all, their idea of sustainability in nature tourism.

The georeferenced sections were established with two criteria: the first criterion was that the distance had to be walkable, and the second criterion was that as much as possible, endpoints had to be places with lodging services. Additionally, with the purpose of facilitating the logistics of the route, the sections were marked based on international criteria for the development of trekking, for which long-distance trails last two or more days (*Manual de senderismo*, 1997). This allowed us to determine the degree of complexity

by section to generate useful information to hikers so that they can compare the routes and select the one that best suits their objectives and circumstances.

Although there are different ways to classify routes, e.g., degree of difficulty and use, when taking into account slope inclination, type of terrain and duration of the walk, trail class is determined by the most challenging section of a route. The trails are divided into three classes, with the easy and intermediate trails clearly signposted and marked, without danger of getting lost in normal conditions (see Table 1). For all classes, the average walking pace for a hiker is estimated with a standard load (water and supplies).

Table 1. Classification of trails by level of difficulty

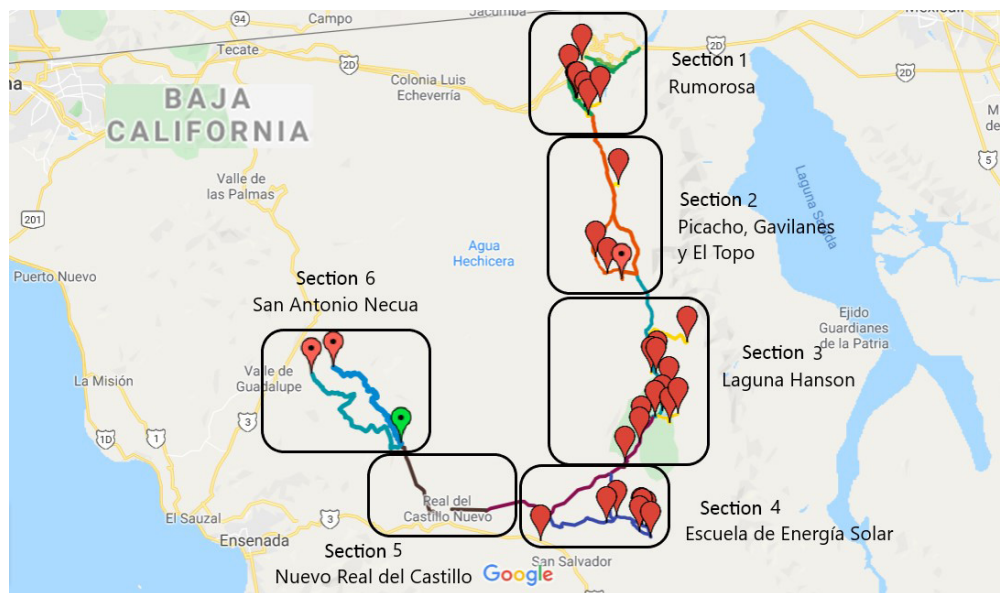
Road symbol	Elevation changes	Type of terrain	Signs and markings	Average pace without load
Easy trail 	Small elevation changes	Grounded or covered with boards	Clear; signposted and marked on the ground	12-15 min/km
Intermediate trail 	Some elevation change	Some rough terrain	Clear; signposted and marked on the ground	16-20 min/km
Demanding trail 	Parts of the trail are steep or difficult to explore	The road may include sections of difficult passage	There is a visible trail or track on the ground, but the signage is scarce or nonexistent	More than 21 min/km

Source: taken from national parks of Finland (<http://www.nationalparks.fi/hikinginfinland/wheretogo/traildifficultyclassification>)

The sketches were developed based on Google maps, in which the trajectories of the route were marked with GPS and the recreational and cultural areas of interest were displayed to indicate, in a simple way, the services offered by each enterprise as well as some attractions within the route. To identify the potential of the attractions and the infrastructure referred to throughout the work, a survey was conducted of the tourist ventures along the route, mostly ranches, composed of six segments: 1) general information, including GPS location coordinates, economic activities and days of service; 2) owner information, including education, experience and reasons for the venture; 3) business strategies, product diversification and advertising; 4) problems, solution mechanisms, levels of cooperation with other ranches and environmental conservation measures; 5) perception of well-being and satisfaction with lifestyle; and 6) services, attractions and available infrastructure.

Based on the concentration of attractions, lodgings and points of interest, the route was divided into zones to indicate the maturity of attractions. The largest sphere marks the area of Laguna Hanson, followed by La Rumorosa and the areas of Picachos, Gavilanes, El Topo and Real del Castillo (Figure 3, Table 2).

Figure 3. Sections of the route



Source: authors based on field work and Google Maps

Table 2. Sections of the route by distance

No.	Section	Connection Points	Distance (km)
1	Rumorosa	Parador La Cuesta-La Rumorosa town	19
		La Rumorosa Town-Ejido Aubanel Vallejo	6
2	Ponderosa, Gavilanes and El Topo	Ejido Aubanel Vallejo-Rancho El Topo	30
3	Laguna Hanson	Rancho El Topo -Laguna Hanson	35
4	Escuela de Energía Solar	Laguna Hanson- Puerta Trampa	35
5	Real del Castillo	Puerta Trampa-Ojos Negros	36
6	San Antonio Necua	Ojos Negros-San Antonio Necua (Sierra route)	38
		Ojos Negros-San Antonio Necua (Stream route)	32
Total	6 sections		193-198

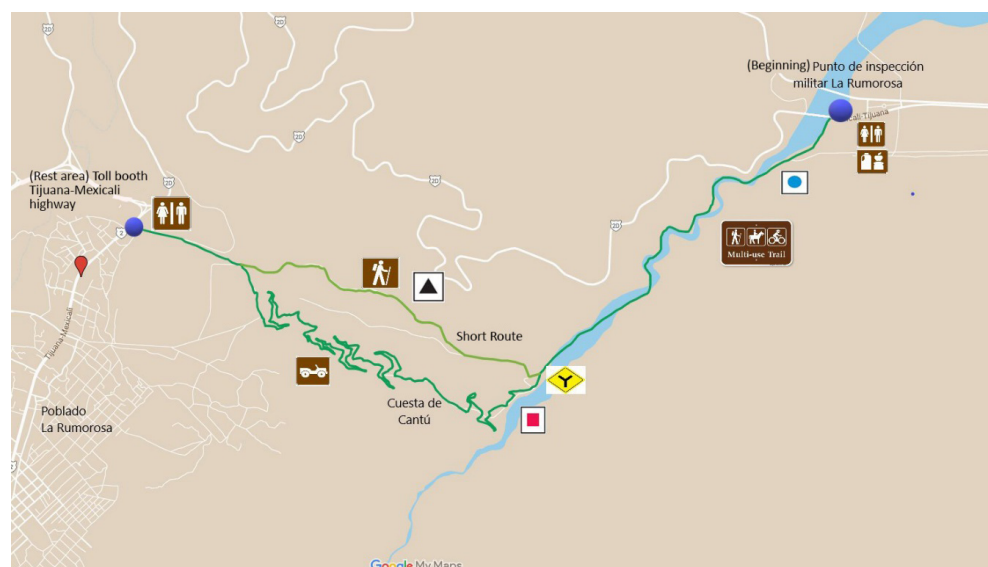
Source: authors based on fieldwork

The route of the trail

Section 1. La Rumorosa-Aubanel Vallejo inspection point

The first section of the route begins at Parador La Cuesta, a space with services next to the La Rumorosa military inspection point, located at kilometer 42 of the Mexicali-Tijuana highway. It is a wide trail easily recognizable and passable for 6 km, until reaching a fork where you can choose between two routes of ascent: the first is to continue along the Cuesta de Cantú trail, a historical trail that has been maintained since its construction in 1918 (Tapia, 2015), with a length of 12 km. The road is wide; therefore, all-terrain vehicles can travel and are classified as an intermediate trail because of the distance and its considerable elevation, although it is manageable for people with adequate physical conditioning. Although there are no signs, the trail is easily identifiable (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Section 1. First part



Source: authors based on field work and Google Maps

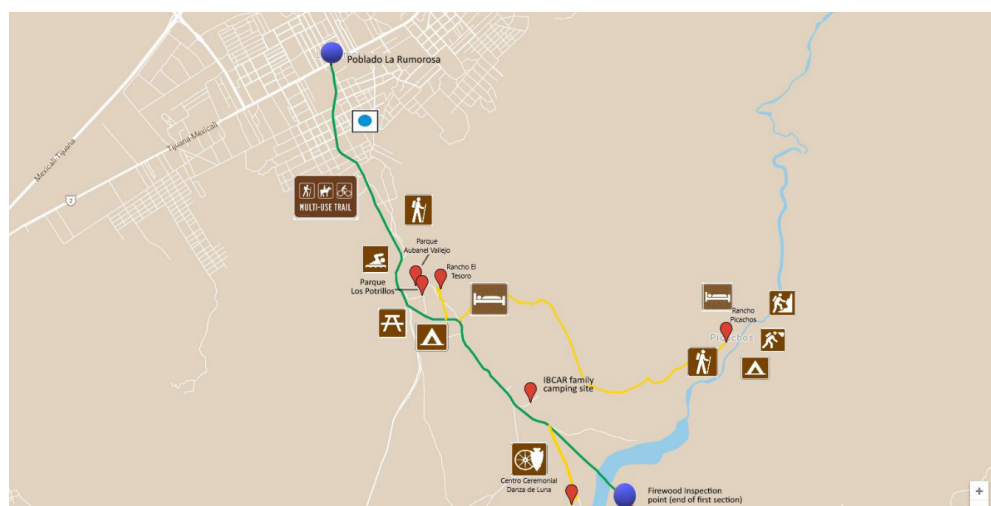
The second ascent option, known as the short route, with a length of 7 km, was created when Pemex gas pipelines were installed; it is considered a demanding trail and is recommended only to people in excellent physical condition. Both options end in the town of La Rumorosa (Figure 4).

The second part, which is 7 km, begins on the outskirts of town on the Tijuana-Mexicali freeway, on the access road to Constitución de 1873 National Park or Laguna Hanson. It is considered of low difficulty because the entire route is a local road, without changes in elevation.

In this second part of the first section, there are two recreational parks that offer various services. The first, Aubanel Vallejo, is a 15-year-old ejido cooperative that was created with the purpose of providing tourist-recreational services and generating additional income for the cooperative.

The second recreational park, Los Potrillos, which is 30 years old, has followed a customer service strategy, strengthening its infrastructure to remain in the market. Rancho el Tesoro, which began as a greenhouse for ornamental plants native to the region, found greater opportunity in the provision of tourism services, which have become its main activity and source of income. (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Section 1. Second part



Source: authors based on field work and Google Maps

Rancho Picachos is ideal for nature, trekking and mountaineering lovers; additionally, caving is also popular. It has tourist services (cabin rentals), a camping area and a high-value landscape. It is located 9 km from the La Rumorosa-Tecate highway.

Section 2. La Rumorosa-Ponderosa, Gavilanes and Rancho El Topo

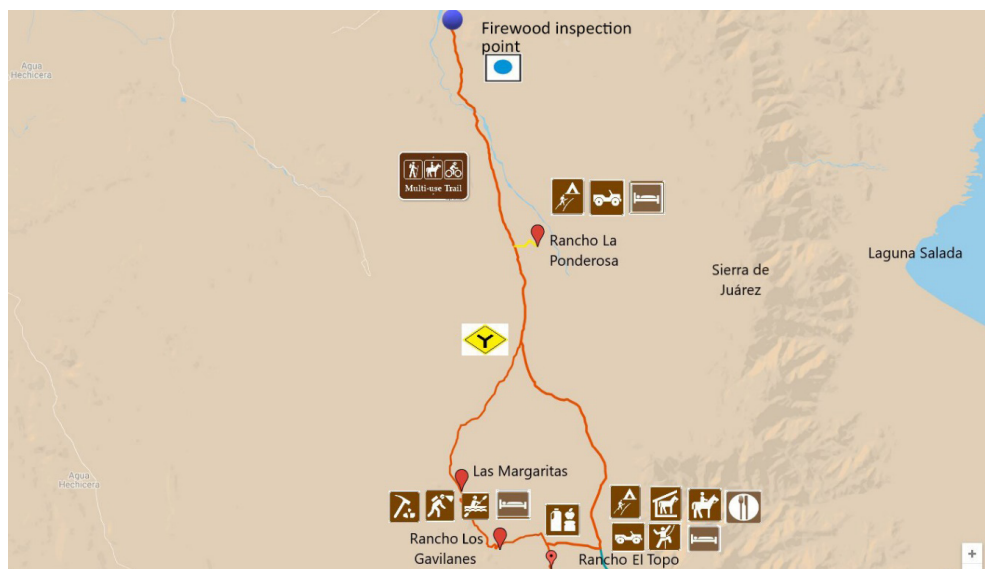
The second section begins at the firewood inspection point of the Aubanel Vallejo ejido and ends at Rancho El Topo, with a distance of 30 km. It is considered an easy trail, as it is a wide dirt road suitable for multiple purposes, with moderate elevation changes, a sandy surface and vegetation that ranges from chaparral and manzanita trees to stone pine.

Rancho La Ponderosa, created 50 years ago for recreational and family purposes, is located at kilometer 12 of the second section. However, using lodging services and adventure tourism, it expanded its sources of income. Economically, it is supported by annual events, such as the *off-road* race from La Rumorosa to La Ponderosa and local competitions on weekends, with local and California teams.

Rancho Los Gavilanes is located in a small valley surrounded by mountains, with a tourist vocation, but because of its foundation as a mining town (tungsten) in the twentieth century, there are still traces of the mines, which give it a unique product profile in the area and a better ability to capitalize on its historical heritage, providing visitors a differentiated product.

Two kilometers away is Rancho El Topo. It was founded in 1935 for livestock breeding and forestry activities that are still in force. The second generation of owners, who went to work in the United States and returned after retiring from the transportation sector, are fluent in English and lead excursions and families mainly from California, complementing its economy through tourist services as a way to sustain a lifestyle with less stress and more flexible work days (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Section 2. Ponderosa, Gavilanes and Rancho El Topo



Source: authors based on field work and Google Maps

Section 3. El Topo-Laguna Hanson

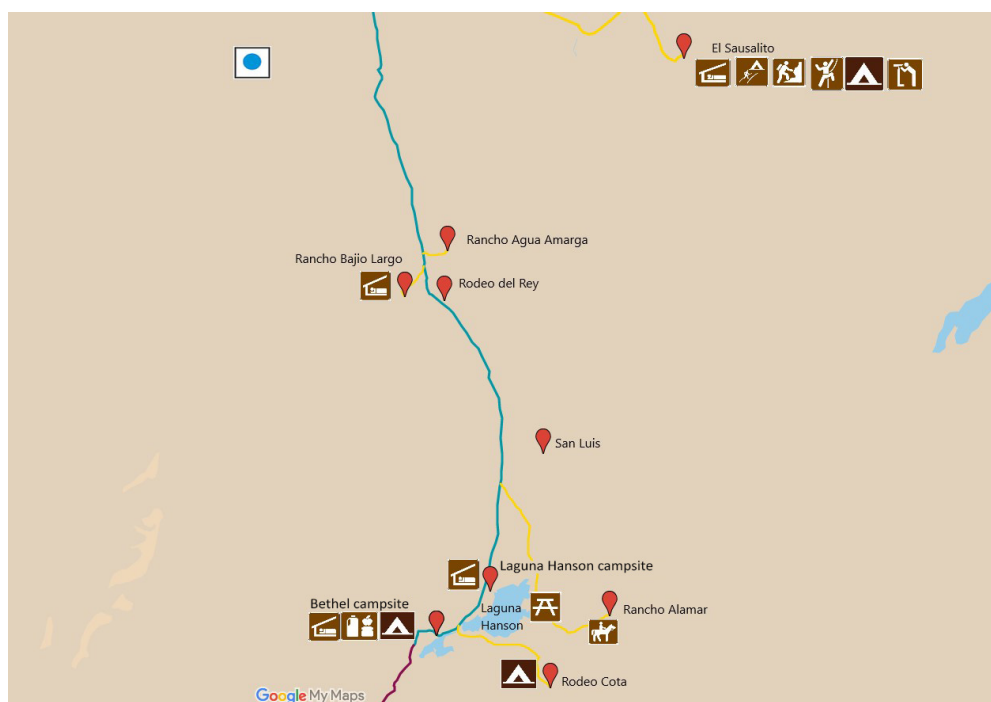
The third section (35 km) is an easy route along a wide road with a sandy surface and slight incline. This part of the route is very beautiful, owing to its large rocks and ponderosa pine forest. In winter, snow is common.

El Sausalito is located 5 km from the road towards Laguna Hanson. It was founded in 1998 with the purpose of providing a space to live in a different way, i.e., more attached to nature. The area is surrounded by granite mountains and coniferous pines. Its owner is a U.S. work accident pensioner. His family is originally from Tecate, and he decided to live at the ranch to seek tranquility. He speaks English fluently and receives Canadian and American families who enjoy rappelling.

The main attraction along the route, recognized by the populations of Baja California and of different areas of California as an enjoyable recreation space, is Laguna Hanson, which is located at an altitude of 1,500 meters above sea level within Constitución de 1857 National Park, with a natural setting in a ponderosa and stone pine coniferous forest, next to laguna Juárez.

Focusing on religious retreats for congregations in California, the Bethel Campsite is also open to the public, with lodging services, bathrooms, and food and water sales on weekends and during the peak season. It was founded in 1996 by a Mexican emigrant who returned from the United States after retiring because he likes the country life and being his own boss (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Section 3. El Topo-Laguna Hanson



Source: authors based on field work and Google Maps

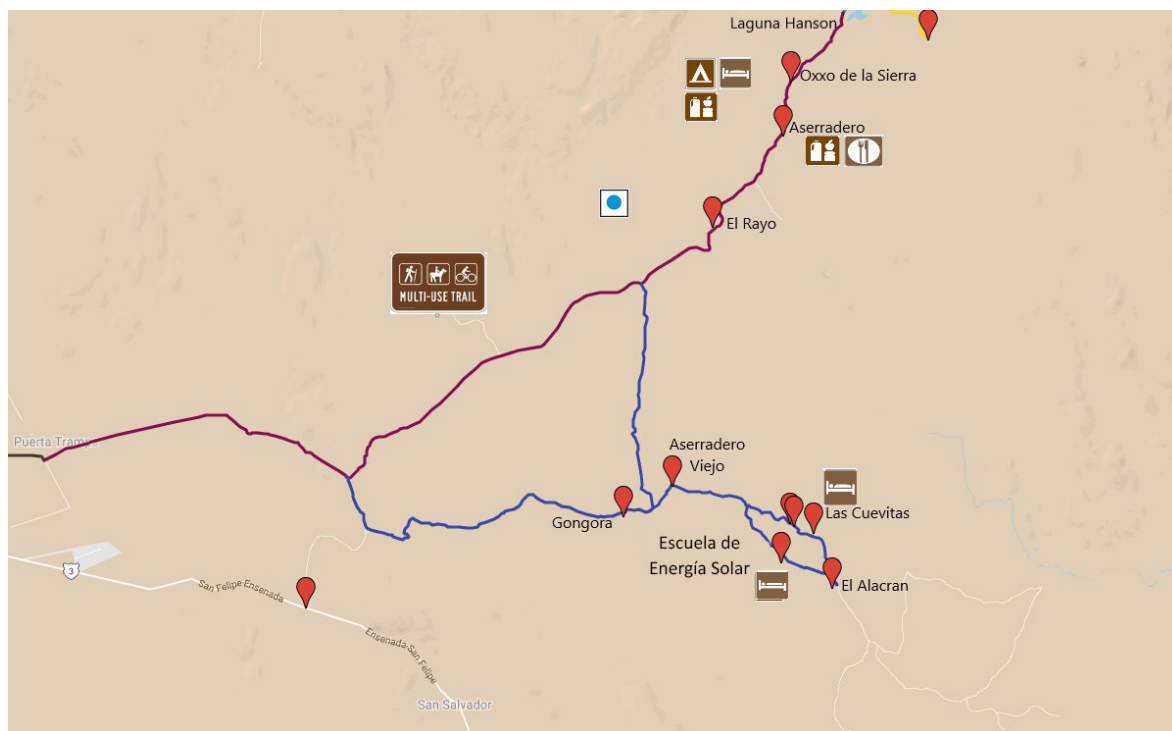
Section 4. Laguna Hanson-Escuela de Energía Solar

Section four begins at Laguna Hanson and has two options for completion: the first in Puerta Trampa, 35 km long, ending in Ojos Negros; and the second, which involves taking a branch prior to Puerta Trampa, ends at Rancho Las Cuevitas or at Escuela de Energía Solar, 30 km away. Both trails are classified as easy, as they are wide with gentle slopes and a few short steep slopes.

Las Cuevitas ranch is located at 15 km; this ranch focuses on ecotourism and offers cabin rentals, recreational areas for games and cave tours. A short distance away is Escuela de Energía Solar, which seeks to disseminate the use of alternative energies, mainly solar panels and wind generators. Its facilities were built with bags of dirt; the structures are low cost with minimal environmental impact and with round structures to resist the force of winds and the weight of snow. In 2007, Escuela de Energía Solar began offering one-month certification courses for the use of solar energy. They have

received students from different Mexican states and South American countries. They have internet resources for and a library on energy, environmental conservation, gardens and construction (Figure 8).

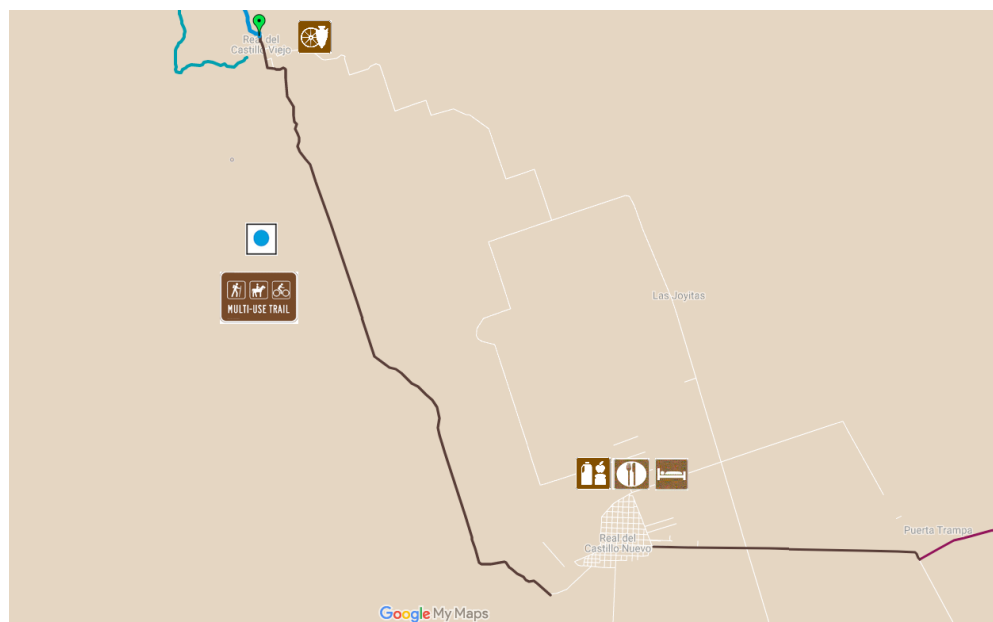
Figure 8. Section 4. Escuela de Energía Solar



Source: authors based on field work and Google Maps

Section 5. Trampa-Real del Castillo Gate

Section five consists of two options: the first is from Puerta Trampa to Real del Castillo, with a length of 7 km, and the second is from the Escuela de Energía Solar to Ojos Negros, with a length of 12 km. Both are complemented by a trail from Ojos Negros to Real de Castillo Viejo, with a length of 20 km. They are considered easy trails because they are wide; however, the trail is heavily traveled by vehicles, mainly from Puerta Trampa to Ojos Negros, and therefore, the amount of dust generated may become annoying to trekkers (Figure 9).

Figure 9. Section 5. Puerta Trampa-Real del Castillo

Source: authors based on field work and Google Maps

A tour allowed us to become familiar with the attractions in the area, for example, the town of Ojos Negros and the Marcelo cheese cellar. Additionally, in Real del Castillo, tourist can visit the old remains of buildings of the former capital of the territory of Baja California during the gold boom (Taylor Hansen, 2007).

Section 6. Real del Castillo-San Antonio Necua or Cañón de Guadalupe waterfall

From Real del Castillo to Valle de Guadalupe, there are two route options, both without any signage: the first begins by climbing the hill in front of the town and ends in San Antonio Necua, covering a distance of 39 km.

In the middle of the route, trekkers pass through Parma ranch, dedicated to livestock, mainly sheep breeding. The remaining trail is secluded with beautiful views of the landscape, multiple ascents and short descents, requiring additional energy expenditure to maintain a good pace. The residents at the ranch are friendly, but tourism services are not offered; therefore, it is necessary to continue, in an environment that generates uncertainty, to San Antonio Necua, where trekkers can learn about the activities offered by the Kumiai indigenous people: elaborate handicrafts created from mud and different trees and the Siñaw Kumatay ecotourism center, its museum and restaurant. Trekkers can spend the night in the surrounding area.

The second option is to follow the trail along the El Barbón stream, with a length of 30 km long; the trail is classified as demanding, with difficult sections due to the thick undergrowth and constant stream crossings. Trekkers who choose this trail can relive

the history of Real del Castillo through mines that are still open as well as the vestiges of old houses of the miners who exploited them. In the roads and curves in the foothills, there are still some cobblestones on the road for carts used both for the transfer of gold from Real del Castillo to San Diego, California, as well as to stock up on implements, food and materials for the miners and merchants in the town (Figure 10).

Figure 10. Real del Castillo



Source: authors based on field work and Google Maps

Very close to Cañón de Guadalupe waterfall there are hot springs, with at least three pools where trekkers can take relaxing baths.

Conclusions

The proposed route has great potential for adventure tourism and trekking, although it requires substantial levels of organization and security to care for and consolidate its reputation as a cross-border attraction. As has been mentioned, a good number of ranches along the route have already transitioned to offering tourist services. Some have been able to expand their infrastructure with government support, mainly for lodging and food spaces that complement their economy. However, the growth of their capacity has been slow by market standards because they do not seek a high flow of visitors but one that allows them to maintain their lifestyle.

To generate greater dynamism, in addition to greater promotion, it is necessary to create more attractions that generate more tourism influx in periods of low demand and, along with this, better organization and monitoring of regulations and a focus on not damaging the environment.

The existing activities begin to generate interactions among participants, promoters and some authorities through civil associations in projects such as La Rumorosa and Ruta del Viento (Wind Route). However, the creation of a tourist hiking route, such as the one designed and documented in this work, can be the point of rapprochement between the local community and their business ideas, with greater participation by experts who help in the planning, promotion and management of natural resources. This would allow the development of products and services with higher international standards that, while maintaining the lifestyle of rural people, can be offered in tourism markets at the local and cross-border levels.

Beyond the lodging infrastructure that has been developed with private and public resources, it is necessary to advance the conceptual infrastructure of the route, where together with the service providers and the adventure and trail tourism groups, the authorities provide the means and resources so that the route is clean, marked, explained with historical, anthropological and flora and fauna information, monitored and promoted at all possible levels so that users of all types can begin their trekking adventure in the desert of Laguna Salada and conclude in the vineyards of the fertile Valle de Guadalupe.

Although goodwill and the best possible treatment have maintained a good relationship between recreational spaces and customers, more training is necessary for better customer care and education. Public policies on the development and promotion of the trail would also be important, but not based on what it has been but what it can be, in light of experiences of self-regulated community development, such as the centuries-old routes of El Camino de Santiago in Spain, the West Highland Way in Scotland, the Lycian Way in Turkey, and the more recently famous Pacific Crest Trail and Appalachian Trail in the United States.

On the route *from the desert to the valley*, the spaces that are served by owners show greater dynamism in their search for strategies to improve their current situation. It is evident that these are social businesses that, with a lot of work and dedication, have managed to realize a lifestyle attached to a simple way of living in close relationship with nature. This has allowed these owners to satisfy their personal and material needs, and by offering tourist services, they are sharing their resources with visitors and thus complement their standard of living in a sustainable way. However, one of the main problems that all participants along the route perceive is insecurity; both owners and those who trek usually feel insecure through the absence of better signage and vigilance or presence of authority.

The sustainability of this trail route, as a whole or in part, means that the required public support is minimal because as an adventure tourism project, it itself provides opportunities for economic development to communities and local users and contributes to their conservation through alternative opportunities that grow naturally with the flow of visitors.

Beyond natural richness and lifestyle richness, the ways of thinking and conceiving of everyday life by the entrepreneurs who live in these areas remain open and willing to share through service and attention. Their capacity for organization and cooperation is foolproof because their daily life depends on it.

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