Dear alumni and friends,

You are invited to join me and a group of Carls on a natural history adventure to visit the “Galapagos of Mexico.” Our tour operator, Lindblad Expeditions, has an exceptional reputation for high-quality trips—an exciting itinerary, trained naturalists who know the local natural history in the sea and on the land, topnotch crew, good food and great company. The combination of living on shipboard and easy access to field sites by means of Zodiaks (sturdy inflatable boats) provides a convenient way to maximize opportunities and have creature comforts and camaraderie at the same time.

Daytime field tours to observe grey whales are a featured opportunity early in the trip. These whales are in their calving grounds in Bahia Magdalena during the winter. We will have ample opportunity to get in close via the Zodiaks. If your comfort level in water is not so high don’t worry—the crew is very safety conscious and there are plenty of life jackets. While back on shipboard there will be ample opportunity for follow up lectures, and have questions answered (Carls tend to ask good questions, go for it).

As we sail further south we will have some time ashore in Cabo San Lucas. Back at sea will also visit a sea mount where the upwelling of deeper nutrient laden water promotes plankton growth which then attracts a diverse array of sea life, including humpback whales, another species we hope to see.

As our trip continues steaming into the Gulf of California (Sea of Cortez) we will visit the islands Los Islotes and Espiru Santo. There will be time for snorkeling with sea lions, swimming, kayaking, hiking on islands inhabited by giant barrel cacti and a barbecue on the beach. We will also be on the search for the largest of all whales, the blue whale, hunted to near extinction but making a comeback. It would be very special to see one, a once in a life time for most folks including myself.

We will also be able to explore other coastal natural communities especially mangroves, an important and threatened habitat for young fish and shrimp. Mangroves play a large role in coastal ecosystems in tropical and subtropical areas of the planet. Mangrove loss in S. E. Asia for example, replaced by commercial shrimp farms (tiger prawns), is a big conservation issue. I will provide an opportunity to explore how a consumer could exercise an environmental ethic as they choose sea food for dinner.

If you do decide to come, be sure to bring your camera. Remember that salt water is very hard on cameras so consider some options for protection (e.g. water proof bag available from stores specializing in outdoor gear). An alternative is to consider a digital camera that is water resistant, or consider a housing if you plan to really get into photography in the wettest of places including snorkeling.

I hope to see you in Mexico in January 2007.

Gary Wagenbach
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Director of Environment and Technology Studies