

# THE IRONMAN WORKOUT

HOW TO GET IN TRIATHLON SHAPE...IN JUST 4 WEEKS

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# Adventure



**SURFING SAFARI** The author, near Ostional, walked 12 miles a day with his trusty Channel Islands Fish surfboard

# The Trek of My Life

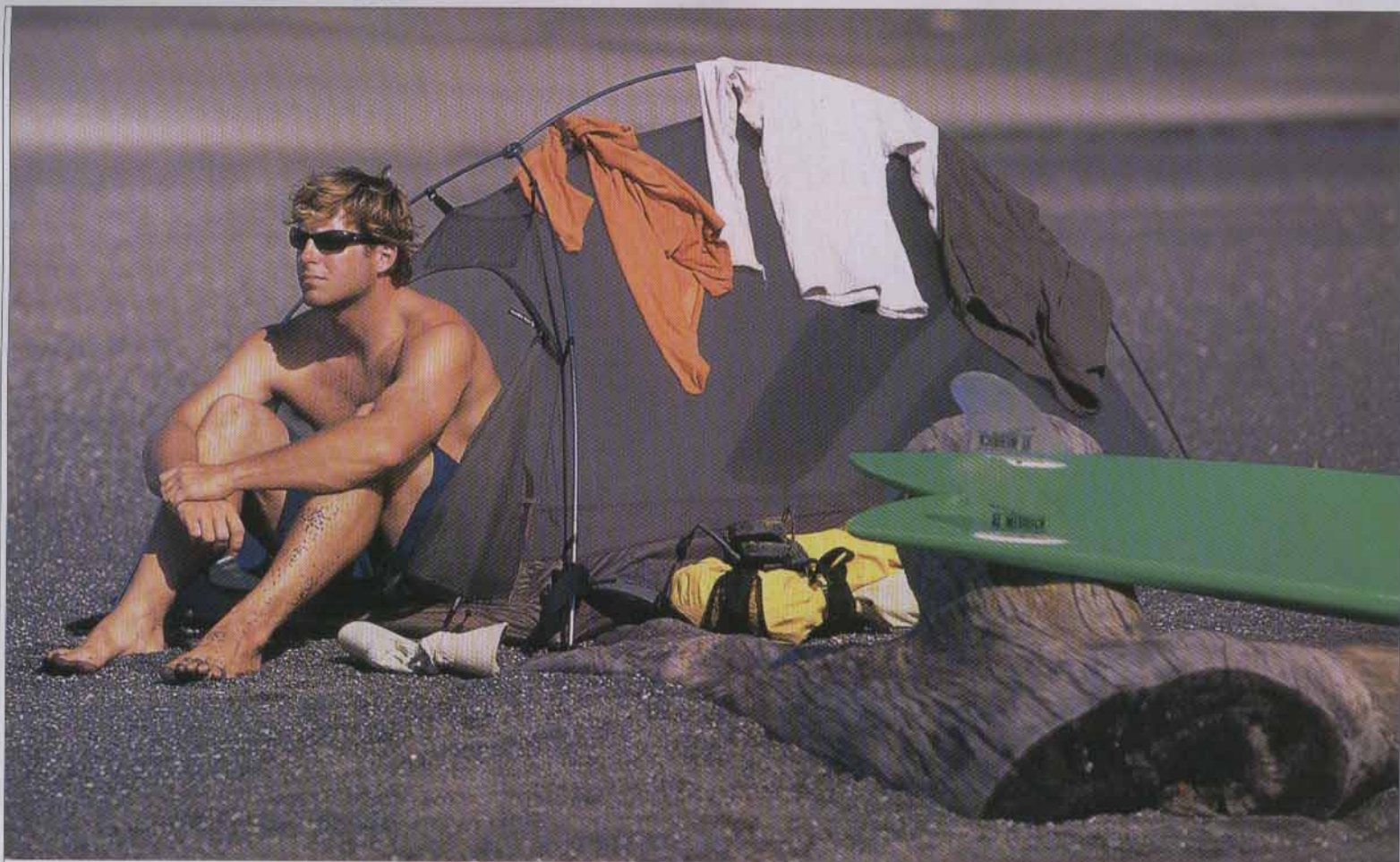
**Ten years ago, Mark Anders hiked a 60-mile stretch of Costa Rica's coastline in search of the perfect wave. This summer he returned to discover how the beaches, and he, had changed.**

I woke at sunrise to the roar of pounding surf and eagerly poked my head out of the tent, like a kid on Christmas morning. I was stoked to see a sizable swell, but the tide was rising toward the campsite. So we gathered our gear, faced the ocean, and took a left.

A decade ago, when a buddy and I hiked down this same 60-mile stretch of Costa Rica's Pacific coast from Tamarindo to Playa Guiones, that was our mantra: "Wake up and take a left." We were trekking down the Nicoya Peninsula looking for perfect waves; when we found them we'd set up camp on the beach and start surfing. If we woke up the next day and the waves were flat or

crowded, we'd just keep heading south.

Ten years later I wanted to recapture the special feelings of freedom and access I got from traveling Costa Rica on foot accompanied only by my knapsack, tent, and board. Surfers call this "going feral," a tip of the hat to animals like the wild pig that roots around dirty and carefree looking for something tasty to eat. By walking every inch of the coastline, I'd have the chance to explore hidden coves and fishing villages, meet more locals, and sniff out uncrowded waves. Still, even die-hard surfers consider it a crazy way to travel. "Why exactly are you doing this?" asked Joe Walsh, the owner of Witch's Rock Surf Camp in Tamarindo, when I told him about my plan.



**PURA VIDA** The author at a campsite near Ostional. His Seedhouse tent, made by Big Agnes, weighed under three pounds, keeping his load under 15 pounds.

The answer was simple: That first trip, a two-month odyssey fueled by surf, cerveza, and señoritas, had changed me, convincing me to move to Southern California and pursue the surfing life. Now things were different: I was 32 years old, with a wife, toddler, career, and mortgage. Of course, trying to re-create a memory is a risky proposition. (The popular wisdom: You can never go back.) But I yearned to rediscover that spontaneity of my youth and to see how much the country I loved had changed. So last November I strapped on my knapsack, tent, and surfboard, recruited my friend Ben from New York to join me, and set off to become a wild pig again.

In 10 years, Tamarindo had changed from a sleepy fishing village into Costa Rica's booming surf hub: Internet cafés dot every corner, bars show *Monday Night Football* live, and there are even a couple of sushi places. I expected to have to walk for a few days before finding vacant surf. But after just three hours we rounded a point north of Playa Avellana and saw something that stopped us in our tracks: peeling rights

breaking off a rock reef — with not another surfer in sight. Back home in Southern California I'd be battling 50 other surfers for waves like this.

Paddling out, I realized the surf

was about eight feet, breaking fast and hard. As the first big set marched in, I took four strokes and was screaming along the face. I blasted through three long sections before the wave exploded

in a mass of roiling whitewater. We surfed alone for two hours, sharing the break with only a string of low-flying pelicans that glided above the water.

This was obviously a fickle spot:

## Walking the Walk

An adventure guide to hiking Costa Rica's Nicoya Peninsula

**H**iking is the most adventurous way to explore the Nicoya Peninsula — although driving its sketchy roads is wild enough for some. Either way, carry a good map, such as the National Geographic Costa Rica Adventure Map (\$10; [ngmapstore.com](http://ngmapstore.com)). You can rent a board in Tamarindo for about \$100 per week. December to February is high season, but it's relatively dry from late November to April; be aware that surfing is banned in some spots during turtle nesting season, July through November. Beach camping is legal in most places, but if you want more comfort, here are some suggestions: **Witch's Rock Surf Camp (1)** in Tamarindo has first-rate instruction and a hopping open-air bar (\$1,290 per week; 888-318-7873, [witchsrocksurfcamp.com](http://witchsrocksurfcamp.com)). **Los Monos Locos (2)** on Playa Coco is mostly a campsite, but has clean toilets and showers (\$2; no phone). **Hotel Luna Azul (3)**, a boutique hotel above Playa Ostional, has seven bungalows and a Jacuzzi with ocean views (from \$85; 011-506-821-0075, [hotellunaazul.com](http://hotellunaazul.com)). The 12-room **Gilded Iguana (4)** is within walking distance of Playa Guiones and has two open-air bars (from \$30; 011-506-682-0259, [gildediguana.com](http://gildediguana.com)).

—M.A.



**BOARD ROOM** At his garage in Carlsbad, CA, the author, with son Luke, waxes his 6'7" thruster, a favorite board in his quiver of 12



Onshore winds and a rising tide junked up the waves just 10 minutes after we dried off. Had we been here an hour earlier, or later, we'd have never known this wave existed. It was a reward for walking, and, hopefully, a taste of what lay to our south.

As we hiked away from Avellana, the sand squishing between my toes as rough as a cat's tongue, my mind began to wander. For the first time in ages I had the luxury of thinking about absolutely nothing. The steady rhythm of my steps and the gentle tug of the backpack had me almost in a trance. Sometimes Ben and I talked. Other times it was quiet — only the crunch of shells under our bare feet and the shish-shish-shish of the sand. I had successfully broken the tethers of my wired life — no cell phone, e-mail, or fax machine. I had nowhere to be and plenty of time to get there.

**"A LARGE SHADOW SKIMMED BELOW MY DANGLING FEET. SHARK! I LAID FLAT ON MY BOARD AND DID MY BEST TO REMAIN CALM."**

Over the next few days the terrain changed from low, cactus-covered bluffs to bright green jungle to steep cliffs where iguanas scrambled up the sun-baked rocks. We awoke often to the screeching howler monkeys who patrol the treetops along the beach, like an eager, hairy cheerleading troupe. We appreciated the encouragement: I had estimated that we needed to do about seven miles per day but failed to account for the distance added by the countless nooks and crannies of the coast. In reality, we were logging close to 12 miles each hiking day — five to seven hours of walking. If the surf was up, we'd have

a morning session; otherwise we'd try to make some mileage before the sun started to blaze. As sunset approached we surfed again and searched for choice camping spots. By 6:45 each night we'd usually be zipped inside our mesh tents.

Along the way we encountered stretches of nothingness peppered with thatch palapas, old fishermen's shacks, and sometimes a row of newly constructed mansions. After seeing how built-up Tamarindo had become, and knowing that tourism in Costa Rica has increased by 85 percent since 1995, I expected the rest of the coast to be more developed. But we encountered

a heartening lack of growth. Food and water was touch-and-go, so we carried granola bars, canned tuna, and water, and gorged on rice, beans, and grilled fish whenever we found a small restaurant. On average we came across only about a dozen other humans a day — local fishermen, *ticos* commuting to work at nearby resorts, sometimes the odd traveler.

It wasn't long before we found ourselves sinking into a state of feralness. We realized that our gear was destined to be damp — whether from rain, sweat, or ocean spray — and our arms and legs were like armadillo skin, a composite of bug spray, sunscreen, and sand. Our inner thighs were chafed raw by the salt crystals caked inside our trunks, despite the bottle of medicated powder I'd poached from my son's diaper bag. But those discomforts paled beside the feeling of freedom. Every so often I'd stop and look back at our footsteps snaking along the coastline, and a sense of accomplishment would pour over me: We'd literally walked as far as the eye could see. The view to the south was mostly the same: just a sweeping curve of sand and rock. Some might find the similarity monotonous — I thrived on it.

**I**n the late afternoon of day four we rounded a point and arrived at Playa Coco, about 35 miles from where we'd begun. A thunderstorm rumbled over the dark jungle, but shafts of sunlight broke through the clouds above the sea. The sunset had painted the sky a thick mix of deep orange, maroon, and yellow, turning the froth of the ocean blood red. It looked like a lost world, the Costa Rica I'd stored in my memory bank.

The waves were breaking head-high and freight-train fast. After walking most of the day I couldn't wait to surf this surreal seascape, so I paddled out and waited. Suddenly a large shadow skimmed below my dangling feet. Shark! I quickly laid flat on my board to get my legs out of the water. I scanned the surface for a dorsal fin or any other sign of movement. I noticed my breath — shallow, quick — and did my best to remain calm.

Just then a large set of waves on the horizon diverted my attention. I stroked frantically, hoping to duck-dive under them without getting slammed. The first wave reached me — easily a seven-foot face. I pushed

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my right foot on the tail of the board and slipped smoothly under. I continued scratching seaward just far enough to slide under the second wave.

As I resurfaced I saw a third, even bigger. I turned and took two quick strokes. The peak jacked up and I jumped onto my board and raced along the undulating wall. I could see the water feathering out just over my head as the wave formed a hollow barrel behind me. No time for turns. I began pumping the board with my feet, trying to outrun the falling wall of water. After about five seconds, I pulled out in front of the wave with just enough space to kick out before it detonated in a thundering whoosh.

For the next two hours I rode perfect waves alone, until the sun had set and my arms felt like overcooked linguini. We decided, for the first time since leaving Tamarindo, that tomorrow morning we'd wake up and stay put.

**T**he next day I sat on the beach eating the last of my granola bars when two gringo surfers waded into the ocean nearby. After not see-

ing another surfer for four days it was jarring.

"Where are you guys from?" I asked, knowing full well they were American.

"From here."

I must have shot back a puzzled look, because one of the guys explained: "I'm actually from the Florida Keys, but I live in Nosara. The waves aren't as good down there, but the real estate business is booming. It's the next Tamarindo."

The small talk continued and we soon found out that one of the guys, a 26-year-old named Brandon, was a real estate agent. He'd buy up large parcels of land from locals, then subdivide them and sell them to rich Americans. Mostly, though,

he spent his days driving around with his scruffy dog searching for waves.

With his single-minded obsession for surf, Brandon reminded me of myself to years ago. Normally I'd be jealous of a guy like that, but now I too was living the dream. Watching the sun rise and set every day had rebooted my system, and I reveled in the raw simplicity of walking the coast. With every step we took and every wave we rode, my desk-jockey



**"WATCHING THE SUN RISE AND SET EVERY DAY HAD REBOOTED MY SYSTEM."**

## Once More Unto the Beach

Stock up on sunscreen: Here are five epic coastal hikes around the world

### GEORGIA

Backpacking beachcombers never see the same **Cumberland Island** twice: Shifting sand dunes turn the 17.5-mile-long national seashore into a constantly changing wilderness, where wild horses roam the sea grass, armadillos poke through the palmettos, and turtles nest throughout the summer. Backcountry campsites dot the northbound hike, with Stafford Beach (3.5 miles from the ferry dock) a short walk from the ocean and Brickhill Bluff (10.6 miles) about an hour's walk from the Atlantic. Reserve early, and bring a jar of horseradish — there are oyster beds to explore as the sun dissolves into the western marshes (camping fee, \$2; 912-882-4335, [nps.gov/cuis](http://nps.gov/cuis)).

### WASHINGTON

**Olympic National Park** protects one of the lower 48's longest and most primitive stretches of ocean shoreline, 65 miles of velvety sands, boulder-strewn beaches, and driftlogs that meet the roots of coastal rain forest. The least crowded section is the 17.3-mile South Coast: Though there are barefoot-friendly parts, bring sturdy shoes to help you rock-hop over starfish-filled tidal pools and climb ladders to the overland passes. Don't for-

get a hard container to keep raccoons from stealing your food as you camp at the edge of the Pacific. And remember binoculars for the migrating whales, otters, and bald eagles, and the jagged seastacks that break the surf (\$5 backcountry permit, plus \$2 camping fee; 360-565-3100, [nps.gov/olymp](http://nps.gov/olymp)).

### NEW ZEALAND

The **Abel Tasman Coast Track** is 32 miles of shortbread-colored beaches and kale-green forests on the northern tip of the South Island, where many visitors are busy tramping the better-known Milford or Routeburn tracks farther south. For the most solitude, go between May and October, when the summer people have disappeared, leaving the sand to the oyster catchers, the tui songbirds, and you. Plan for four days and start in Marahau, near Nelson. You'll cross gin-clear streams and tides from the Tasman Sea, sleeping at tent sites or in park-managed huts with bunkbeds until you hit Awaroa. There you'll find cold drinks at the luxury Awaroa Lodge and a yellow water taxi to take you back to Marahau (from \$5 for campsites, \$7 for huts; 64-3-525-8026; [doc.govt.nz](http://doc.govt.nz)).

### BRAZIL

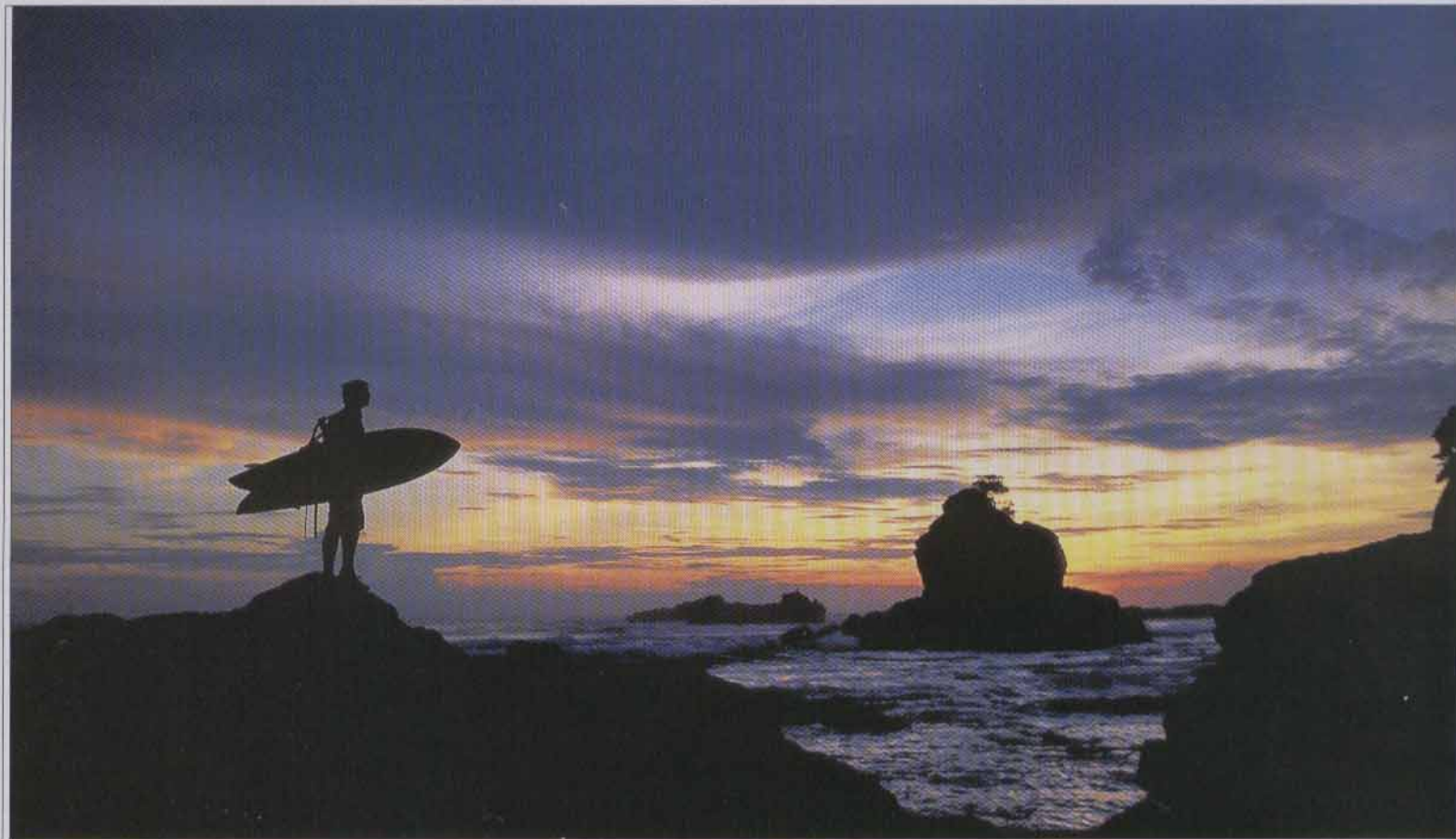
There's more underfoot than just supple

sand at **Itaúnas**, on the southeast coast of Brazil: Beneath the golden domes lies an old fishing village that was swallowed by the dunes in the 1960s. Today the rebuilt town — now set a half-mile back from the Atlantic — is your departure point for hiking the 15-mile coastline of Parque Estadual de Itaúnas, a wilderness populated by jaguars, monkeys, sloths, and sea turtles. As evening falls, return to the beachfront Casa da Praia hotel to partake in the nightly *forró* dance parties — best initiated with a few caipirinhas (hotel rooms from \$15; 55-27-3762-5028, [casadapraiaitaunas.com.br](http://casadapraiaitaunas.com.br)).

### MEXICO

At 51 miles, **Playa Novillero** is Mexico's longest beach; it's also safe, surfer-friendly, and free of the high-rise complexes that choke Puerto Vallarta, 125 miles to the south, and much of the rest of the central Pacific coast. Start and end your trek in the town of Tecuala, which is a half-hour from the beach by bus. Between stints of walking the narrow strip of sand, you can fish for snapper or surf the gentle breaks. Camp for free among the coconut groves, and don't miss the spectacular sunsets — as kaleidoscopic as an *helado* stand (52-311-214-8071, [visitanayarit.com](http://visitanayarit.com)).

— SARAH TUFF



**SUNSET BOULEVARD** The author scouting for a campsite near San Juanillo. He was usually asleep by 6:45 PM and awake with the sunrise at 5 AM.

shell molted away, and I felt a youthful energy I hadn't sensed in years.

The surf was still pumping at Playa Coco a day and a half later, but we had to move on so Ben could catch his ride to the airport and I could meet up with photographer Corey Rich, who was joining me for the final leg of the journey. Corey quickly fell into my pace and we made good time, although at a crocodile-infested river mouth we had to borrow a rowboat to get across with all his gear.

One day around sunset, as we rounded a steep point near San Juanillo, our way was blocked by a 50-yard-long wall of vertical rock. The tide was coming in quickly and darkness was weighing heavy on the rocks. We had to find another way around.

We backtracked for 30 minutes in the darkness and found a tiny goat trail leading into the jungle. Peeling apart the green, we slipped through the thick vines. The path, singletrack and steep, looked as though it hadn't been used in years, and we got lost several times. The forest was alive with sound and constant movement — frogs croaking loudly, faceless birds screeching nearby.

Finally we found the skeleton of a house in a tight clearing and ducked under a fence and onto a narrow dirt road. I was muddy, sweaty, and bleeding from the rusty barbed wire.

"I can't remember whether or not I've had my tetanus shot recently," I said.

"It doesn't matter," Corey laughed. "It'll be days before lockjaw sets in."

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**"THE TIDE WAS DROPPING, AND THE WIND SUDDENLY TURNED OFFSHORE. IT SEEMED THE PACIFIC WAS OFFERING ME ONE LAST GIFT."**

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We walked south on a dirt road in the pitch dark for three or four miles. No sign of humanity until, at the top of a steep hill ribbed with thick mud ruts, we saw a mirage shimmering in the distance: a small, warmly lit hotel. Before I knew it we were soaking in a Jacuzzi, drinking ice-cold Pilsen beer, and peering out across the inky jungle toward Playa Ostional.

The next morning we trekked back to the beach and watched sea turtle hatchlings squirm in the sand and head for the sea. But ironically, we couldn't even surf — the nesting turtles meant ocean use was restricted, and locals and tourists were slowly filtering onto

the beach to watch them. It was the highest concentration of humans I'd encountered on my entire journey, and it made me feel uneasy — almost claustrophobic.

Joe Walsh had agreed to pick us up the next morning in his speedboat and bring us back to Tamarindo. It required a grueling afternoon of hiking

waves were breaking. We paddled our gear out to the boat — duck-diving under the waves with waterproof packs strapped to our backs. By the time we finished loading the boat, the tide was dropping, and the wind suddenly turned offshore. It seemed the Pacific was offering me one last gift. So along with Joe and his boat captain, Rodrigo, I savored the shoulder-high surf. The bathtub-warm ocean felt thick and viscous, almost embracing me as I paddled.

Later, as we sped toward Tamarindo a couple hours away, I sat near the bow and gazed at the shoreline that had challenged me for the past nine days. Instead of the obstacle course of rocky points, river mouths, and sandy swatches, it looked almost inconsequential, blended together into a flat green and brown backdrop. The breaks we'd surfed looked like anonymous blurs of whitewater.

"Well, the good news is we just surfed great waves all by ourselves," Joe yelled over the roaring engine. "The bad news is we may not have enough gas to make it all the way back to Tamarindo."

"No worries," I said, chuckling. "We can always walk."