

Building Rock Gabions and Check Dams Supports Sustainable Ecotourism in the Cacachilas Mountain Range, B.C.S., Mexico

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Rancho Cacachilas, La Paz, BCS, México

Rancho Cacachilas is a land restoration and ecotourism project in the Sierra Cacachilas mountain range, 30km east of the city of La Paz, Baja California Sur, Mexico. The 14,000 ha of the ranch are located in the upper mountain range of the Los Planes watershed, which has historically been impacted by overgrazing of goats and cattle as well as deforestation from cutting down of hardwood trees for fence posts, leather tanning, and mining operations. This ecosystem degradation started back in the Jesuit era at the turn of the 18th Century when mining began. This degradation worsened in the 20th century, with government subsidies for rancho families to expand their herds and get free animal feed during summer months. To revert the desertification and land erosion trend, Rancho Cacachilas embarked in 2013 in an intense project of gabion and check dam construction in the canyons of the ranch and installing these and our unique, gabioncitos, along the road network. Fencing of the entire ranch began in 2020 and continues to this day to exclude free roaming cattle. Our rock detention structures have had a direct impact on the vegetation, biodiversity, and water flows along our canyons. Most thrilling is the return of oasis-type ecosystem with palm groves, water-loving plants and semi-perennial water flows in arroyos that started as bare rock channels and were converted into sand and organic matter sponges by constructing "gabion stairways" along mile long stretches. This water replenishment work is now supporting a diversity of activities at Rancho Cacachilas, ecotourism around hiking and biking in our regreened canyons, cheese making and sustainable meat production from holistically managed cattle and organic agriculture to produce fruits and vegetables that our chef prepares for our ranch guests, a virtuous cycle of ecological, social and economic abundance.

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