



NEWS OF THE P.A.T.C. MOUNTAINEERING COMMITTEE

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The Southwest and Mexico, 9/19 to 10/5, by R. Moore and F. Peckham

With only 16 days for a vacation trip, Ray Moore and Tony Soler decided to explore a little in the southwest, and invited Jack Wilson and Felix Peckham to accompany them. Tentatively the trip contemplated visits to Carlsbad Caverns and Big Bend National Parks, and perhaps a short excursion into Mexico. Due to the amount of gear carried, it was decided to take two cars and the schedule called for arriving at Carlsbad two days after departure from D.C. Both cars left Washington late Friday, Sept. 19, had an impromptu rendezvous in Northern Louisiana for dinner, and arrived in Carlsbad Sunday. Monday was grey and rainy and the weather continued that way for the duration of the stay in "sunny New Mexico". The poor weather proved to be an ill omen, as was discovered when the group went to visit Dr. Hoskins, the Director of the Park. He had been forewarned of the visit and met them with all due courtesy, but advised them that private exploration of either Carlsbad or any of the 20 wild caves in the Park area is prohibited unless the explorers are accompanied by a member of the Park Service. This was agreed to enthusiastically, but he then brought forth that "they were short-handed just now, and no Park employees were available for such assignments." He compromised by writing passes to Carlsbad - the regular tourist route through the cave was taken and followed the Photographic Tour. The cave is very scenic, but it seemed rather strange to the spelunkers to be going through a cave in the company of several hundred other people.

While talking with the Park Naturalist later, they were told that there were caves of interest in Lincoln National Forest about 30 air-miles west of Carlsbad, and after obtaining directions and a map, they set out for Cottonwood Cave. The route followed covered about 70 miles of increasingly difficult mountain roads, and the cars finally stalled about 2 miles from Cottonwood Cave, refusing to go up hill any further. The cave proved to be extremely scenic, and contains many large, ornate formations, some of which exceed anything in Carlsbad in size. The cave is essentially dead, although some dripping was observed. An unusual geological feature noted was a layer of fine volcanic ash, several inches or more thick, covering the first few hundred feet inside the cave.

After exploring and photographing the cave, the group left for Big Bend National Park, along the border of Texas and Mexico, and arrived there Wednesday evening. As before, the onslaught had been announced by early letters. This time, however, the Park personnel welcomed them with open arms. Enough activities had been programmed for them to keep a party busy for weeks instead of the mere days