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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

that were available. Dr. Maxwell, the Park Director, was away, but his assistant, Bob Gibbs, was most courteous to the group in his absence. He introduced them to Mr. and Mrs. Pete Koch, who are good friends of the Conn's. Pete is the official park photographer.

The remainder of Thursday was spent reconnoitering the area and making a rather easy climb to the top of Casa Grande on the east side of the basin which was selected as the camp site. Casa Grande is by far the most impressive thing within sight of the Basin, with sheer cliffs of perhaps 1000 feet. An attempt was made on the cliffs by Tony, but it was stymied by rotten rock.

Early the following day, at the suggestion of Bob Gibbs, the group decided to investigate Fern Canyon, a relatively unexplored side canyon running into Mexico from Santa Helena Canyon. Santa Helena Canyon is on the western-most side of Big Bend Park and is a deep gorge, with 1800 foot walls at the mouth, which has been cut by the Rio Grande. Pete Koch went along with them, and they went up Santa Helena on the American side, following a trail at first, and later wading. Arriving opposite Fern Canyon, they swam the river, and proceeded up the canyon, alternately swimming and climbing through a series of potholes. Eventually one of the potholes stopped them, and they went back down the canyon to the river. It had risen in the meantime, and they were forced to swim back down to the mouth of Santa Helena, towing the cameras and packs on a raft improvised from reeds and driftwood.

Sleep came easy that night, and they did more mountain climbing the following day, visiting some unusual rock columns 200 to 300 feet tall known locally as the "Cigars", fascinating, but unclimbable because of rotten and treacherous rock. An early return to camp that evening was climaxed with the annual barbecue held by the Park personnel - barbecued goat and all the trimmings, followed by dancing afterwards.

In the course of the evening, discussion of caves came about and one of the wax smugglers mentioned a couple of small caves that he had seen on the eastern side of the Park. (Wax smuggling is a perfectly legal occupation in Texas, but not in Mexico.) Felix and Jack, being foot-sore, decided to forego this side trip, and after making arrangements to meet them in Laredo, Tony and Ray, along with Pete Koch, Carter Davis and one of the rangers, headed for the caves. These proved to be rather small sheltered caves located on a rather inaccessible cliff face. Several of them were entered but little was found to recommend them in the way of size, formations or anything except bat guano which one had in terrific quantities! Having exhausted the time available for activities in Big Bend, Ray and Tony rejoined Jack and Felix in Laredo and from there, the group proceeded south to Monterrey, Mexico. The group was hoping to contact Pedro Wood, one of the leading cavers in Mexico, but learned that he was in New York. The following day they drove out to Grutas de Garcia and took a rather lengthy photographic trip through the very beautiful cave. It had formations that were certainly larger than the ones in Carlsbad and approximated in magnitude those that had been seen in Cottonwood. In addition, it was quite a large cave and the Mexican guide was more than willing that any of the unexplored areas in it should be explored. Unfortunately, most of these proved to be tunnels opening into the top of the ceiling 200 feet above the nearest approach point, or other equally inaccessible holes. Camp was made at the foot of the inclined railway going up to the cave, and after breakfast the following morning, the cavers proceeded to Saltillo and then to Arteaga, in an unsuccessful effort to locate Grutas de Arteaga, a wild cave. The final day in Mexico was spent partially at a beautiful resort hotel near Horsetail Falls, about 20 miles south of Monterrey, following which, the group hit the road for the border. The return trip across country was fairly leisurely, and they arrived back in Washington early Sunday, 16 days after departure.

Echo Cliffs, 26 October 1952

John Christian	Peg Koister	Chris Scoredos
Henry H. Douglas	Bill Kemper	Eric Scoredos
Marvin Gustafson	Ray Moore	Helen Scoredos
Don Hubbard	Gerry Morgan	John Scoredos
Shirley Jackson	Johnnie Reed	Jane Showacre
Jerry Jankowitz	Ann Remington	Arnold Wexler
George Kamm	Bruce Remington	Jim Willard

The persistence of the unusually dry October weather undoubtedly attracted many climbers to this scheduled trip. Even the old maestra himself, Don Hubbard, came along to confound and astound the young squirts.

On arrival at the cliffs, the climbers promptly divided up into three groups. The first, with Don as the sparkplug, were led around some of the sights that Echo Cliffs is noted for, and wound up doing a few pitches and practicing rappels, belaying and sundry tricks of the trade.

A second group, consisting of Arnold, Ray, Jane, and possibly one or two others started a lengthy traverse heading upstream.

The third group went up to Donald's Duck in a rubber boat which had been brought along by Johnnie. The boat, by the way, had done yeoman duty in the Canadian Rockies, in company with A. Wexler, D. Hubbard, Sterling Hendricks, Chris Scoredos, et al, and had apparently deteriorated in storage. On putting it in the water, it promptly developed a leak in the aft compartment, making things rather uncomfortable for the prime mover.

This third group consisted of Peg, Johnnie, Jerry, and Shirley. Jerry led, with Johnnie, Peg, and Shirley following, in that order. The climb proceeded uneventfully until Shirley was brought around the rather tricky corner, at which point she fell and swung over against the cliff face on the end of the rope, suffering numerous bruises and considerable loss of dignity. Gerry was in the boat taking pictures of the climbers, and brought it over underneath Shirley to effect a rescue. A climber to the end, Shirley insisted on waiting around to watch the finish of the climb.

The second group suffered a similar mishap when Ray came off a tricky part of the traverse, having first thoughtfully warned Johnnie, who was then in the boat, to be on the alert for the rescue.

After lunch, the Inclined Slab, Socrates Downfall, and some other unnamed climbs were given a going over. The Inclined Slab was conquered by many, but perhaps the most valiant attempt on it was made by Bruce, who shows promise of emulating his mother. Socrates Downfall evaded most of the climbers. Ann put on an interesting show when, while falling off the climb, her rope jammed in a crack, and she dangled for quite awhile in the rope. Complaining that the rope was interfering with her breathing, she inverted herself and hung upside down until the rope was freed. In later attempts, both she and Arnold made the climb.

A chilly breeze sprang up in the afternoon, and the rock climbers gradually disappeared. Some of the group took advantage of an invitation to go over to Susie Broome's place for dinner.

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Apology:

Due to the relatively infrequent publishing of Up Rope, it is not possible to furnish news while it is still fresh. As most of you know by now, the trip to Wolf Gap Shelter, scheduled for Nov. 15-16, was called off because of the extreme fire hazard which was then prevailing.

Personalia:

Jerry Jankowitz has finally succumbed to Uncle Sam's personal invitation to a course in muscle development. Jerry has been one of our more active and able climbers, and will no doubt be a useful addition to the Army.

Marion Harvey has just returned from a six-weeks sojourn in Europe. She visited a number of countries, including Switzerland, but the onset of winter prevented her doing any climbing, and there was not yet enough snow for skiing.

Included with this issue is another addition to your Up Beat booklet, supplied by Frank Sauber. We will soon have no excuse for a lack of music, at this rate.

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