



S U P P L E M E N T

FIELD TRIP TO STILLWELL

by Bob Patterson

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Editor's Notes:



All I can say is I should have gone with this group to Stillwell and also taken the scenic tour of Big Bend again. It appears that the weather was a little warm during the day but what can one expect in the desert.

Thanks to Bob and JoAn for the good stories and pictures.

..... Jerry Davis

traveled separately to the ranch. Tony and Don traveled by the southern route thru San Angelo and I elected to travel through Midland by the northern route. Helen and I stopped in Imperial at the Permian Sea shrimp factory and had a shrimp lunch and purchased some fresh shrimp. The shrimp here are raised in salt water ponds and are harvested in October, in fact, they were just completing the harvest.

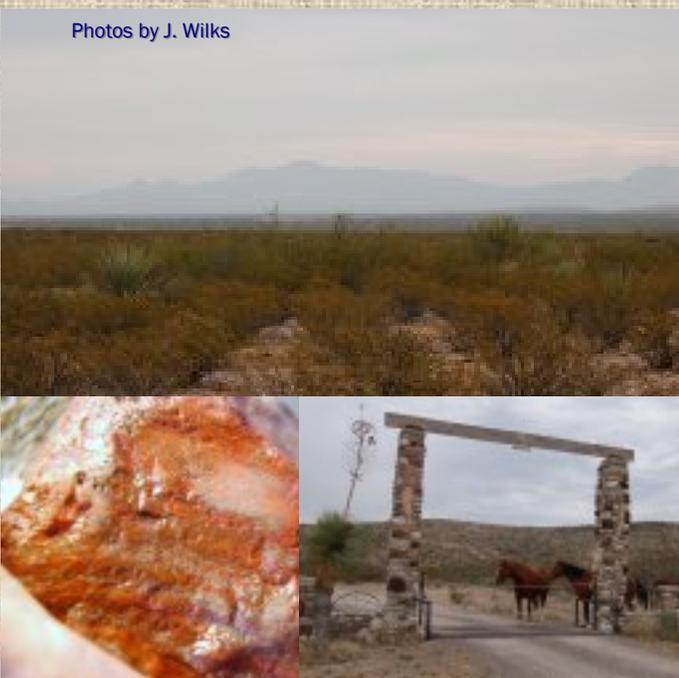
We traveled on to Fort Stockton and between there and Marathon met numerous (more than twenty) oil tankers

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Near the end of October Tony Steele told me that he was planning a trip to Deming, NM. These plans didn't materialize because of the requirements of his employer. I could tell in talking to him that he was disappointed. Later he called and said that he was organizing a trip to the Stillwell Ranch on November 10th. We decided to go and Judy and Tony Steele, Don Brenholtz, JoAn Wilks, and Bob and Helen Patterson made up the group. We had all been to the ranch before and knew that it was a good place.

We left home the morning of November 10 and

Photos by J. Wilks





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headed north. Several new oil fields are being developed between Ft Stockton and the mountains north of Marathon. You can see that if we met around 20 trucks in 45 minutes a great amount of oil is being produced. I guessed that the production must be on the order of 50,000 barrels per day. I was pleased to see a large volume like that being produced in Texas. That is some money that won't be sent to the Arabs and Venezuela.

We drove on to Marathon and had a beautiful view of the overthrust south of Marathon and north of the Big Bend Park.



This thrusting took place during the Mississippian Period and was caused by the collision of the African and N American plates. After the plates pulled apart the southern plate divided to form Africa and South America thereby creating the Gulf of Mexico. The thrust faults are very beautiful and can be seen extending in a NE to SW direction.

This zone begins near Marathon and extends about 35 miles south.

US 385 provides access to the north entrance of the Big Bend National Park.

This entrance is at a place called Persimmon Gap which is actually a gap in a long SE trending ridge of mountains. The scenery from Marathon to the park entrance is beautiful and is composed of erosional remnants of lava flows that occurred during the Tertiary period.

We followed 385 to just north of Persimmon Gap and turned left on FM 2627. This is a narrow unimproved highway that provides access to a border crossing at La Linda on the Rio Grande River. We drove 6 miles and through a sharp cut in a ridge and at the foot of the hill on the right is the Stillwell Ranch headquarters.



This is a working ranch still although I suspect their main occupation is catering to the RV and tourist trade.

This ranch was established by

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Hallie Stillwell and her family in the early 1900s. The ranch comprises nearly 35,000 acres and lies immediately North of the Black Gap Wildlife Management Area. This area was formed in large part from lands from the



Stillwell ranch.

There is a small museum here devoted to the artifacts accumulated by Hallie Stillwell and her history. There is a store at the headquarters which sells necessities and is well stocked with food and various brands of beer.



I suggest if you plan a trip to this location to plan on your requirements and carry them with you. Helen bought butter there; two sticks of butter (1/2 lb) cost her \$2.50. Gasoline is available and they have an air compressor for tires and tire repairs are also available.

We arrived at about 4 PM and checked in with Mr. W.T. Potter; Hallie Stillwell's son-in-law. Their rates for full hookups for RVs are \$17.50 per day and there are several available. Tent camping is also available and several large trailers are available for rent at rea-

sonable rates. The water is good and WT told me that it is nearly 130 degrees hot from the ground and they pump it to the top of the hill behind the ranch where it is stored in a large tank and allowed to cool. I think I'd better get to the important part of this, the rock hunting.

When we arrived and checked in we found our other friends there and Judy and JoAn had already climbed the hill behind the ranch. JoAn was taking pictures and Judy was rock hunting. During the course of our stay JoAn made a lot of excellent photos. We were very fortunate to have such an accomplished photographer with us. I took several pictures and in the process of photographing the headquarters building I dropped my camera. This terminated my photography for the remainder of the trip.

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After setting up our trailers, we decided to wait until the next day to go out hunting. Judy had found several small rocks near the ranch, one of which was a red jelly opal.



The next morning we left camp and crossed the road. The gate was an old lariat rope tied across a cattle guard. From here we could see a large tank on top of a ridge about 5 miles away. This was our destination. Tony led the way and drove up a dusty road about 2 miles and turned left at a wire gap and followed a

ranch road by two windmills and across a dry creek. About ½ mile farther we got into some low hills that were covered with Creosote, low Mesquite bush and Catclaw bushes. Also, there are numerous types of cactus plants. Everything out here has thorns on it.



The bushes are generally about 4 feet tall and are spaced around 3 to 5 feet apart except in the washes where they are closer.

When we reached the base of the hills we scattered out and started to hunt. The rock is fairly small with a few larger pieces.

The rock hunting is fairly easy although since most of good rock has been picked up near the trails and you have to walk a good ways from the roads to find desirable rocks.

We all immediately began to find good rock of many varieties. These were fossils, agates of many types, and small to large chunks of petrified wood.

In fact, there is a large variety of good quality rock here most of which are rounded by erosion and fractured into smaller sizes by natural and human means. Many good rocks were found by noon. By this time it had gotten very warm.

Judy discovered some shade near the large water tank and we all clustered in this shady spot to have lunch.

We scattered out after lunch and



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continued to hunt rocks. At about 3 PM we returned to camp for a siesta.

Tony cooked a Cajun boiled



dinner that evening. This consisted of corn on the cob, lemons, potatoes and shrimp all cooked together in a pot.

This was a good meal. We all took turns furnishing meals and all ate together. We certainly enjoyed the good food, drink and companionship.

After dinner we all compared



our finds and JoAn photographed some of them. We hunted rock for three days and found many good ones. The third day WT told Tony about a pile of picture rock dumped by a trail three miles from the camp. We went to this location and all found some good material.

On the fourth day Helen and I had to leave and went to pay our bill. We had about 50 lbs of rock and WT charged us for about 30 lbs at 50 cents per lb. Also, we had the picture rock and some large chunks of wood that he didn't include in the bill.

On the way home, we crossed a



cold front at Ft. Stockton and had a

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very windy trip the remainder of the way but arrived home late in the evening. We were tired, but pleased with our outing.

Our other friends decided to stay another day and went on a sightseeing trip to the Big Bend Park.

All in all, we had a wonderful trip; if you haven't been there you can't imagine what a quiet, peaceful and wonderful spot this is. Many people come here to hike, bird watch, hunt and generally relax.



..... Bob





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Sightseeing in the Big Bend National Park by by JoAn Wilks

Wednesday

November 14, 2007

On our last day at Stillwell Ranch, we (Don, JoAn, Judy & Tony) decided to go sightseeing into Big Bend National Park. The Park lies adjacent (west) of Stillwell Ranch about 5 miles. Big Bend is noted for its natural resources and spectacular geology. Being real rock hounds, Big Bend geology had our attention. Big Bend has often been described as a geologist's paradise.



From 500 million year old rocks at Persimmon Gap to modern-day windblown sand dunes at Boquillas Canyon. The concept of geologic time, however, is not so easily understood.

We came into the Park at Persimmon Gap. Our first stop was to see the most famous of Big Bend's fossil treasures from this period, the giant flying reptile, Quetzalcoatlus northropi, with a wingspan over 35 feet. We saw part of him...I was not im-

pressed. Actually, I believe someone took part of him. He was not all there.

At our next stop, we walked a trail to an overlook and observed volcanic ash and lava layers laid down between roughly 38 and 32 million years ago when Big



Bend itself hosted a series of volcanic eruptions.

The Park's winding road has several scenic overlooks.....



We stopped at Sotol Vista Overlook..... Sotol is a native plant, some with a bloom more than 10' high. Sotol Vista Overlook was at a high elevation with spectacular views of the Chisos Mountains and the magnificent cliffs of the Sierra del Carmen in Coahuila, Mexico.



WOW! WHAT A VIEW!

We stopped at Castolon (a store and former very old village in the park) for lunch. We sat on a picnic table under long cane roof shelter.

They had ice cream..... It was a

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Sightseeing in the Big Bend National Park by by JoAn Wilks

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hot day.

Our next stop was Santa Elena Canyon along the Rio Grande River.



This amazing cliff canyon rises in elevation over 1500 feet above the river.

WOW!..... WHAT A VIEW!!!



We hiked the Santa Elena Canyon Park Trail and saw the dramatic walls of exposed fossils deposited when a warm, shallow sea invaded the Big Bend during the Cretaceous Period, some 135 million years ago; thus providing the setting for deposition of lime mud and the remains of



sea-dwelling organisms such as clams and snails. Displacement along this fault at Santa Elena Canyon did not occur in a single

event, rather in a series of lesser episodes of faulting punctuated by earthquakes.

Would you believe that in 1995 a magnitude 5.6 earthquake occurred near Marathon, Texas? This indicates that the responsible stresses are still active.

The air from the canyon was nice and cool as we walked along the Rio Grand River sand bar.



I really enjoyed our day. I guess, for me, the only difficult part of our day was not picking up rocks – pretty rocks. Rock collecting in the Park is prohibited. However, we did collect rock memories and rock pictures. We ended our fun day with a great meal that Tony cooked and a wild game of dominos.

..... Thanks, Tony and Judy for this great field trip.....

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Sightseeing in the Big Bend National Park by by JoAn Wilks

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Photos and story by J. Wilks
Geology information from
Big Bend National Park Brochure

Sightseeing in the Big Bend National Park by by JoAn Wilks

