

TRAILS

January 2012

MY TRIP REPORT FOR JANUARY—RICHARD

As most of you know, the January 20-22nd PBOC trip was the Chimneys Trail in Big Bend National Park. When I arrived at the trailhead Friday I met with our trip leader Pat Dearen. It looked like we were going to have more backpackers than the park would allow on this trail (15) so I decided to get what the park calls a "zone permit" which would allow me to go camp anywhere I wanted in the western zone. I chose the River Road West since I knew from my rangers days in Big Bend I would have that part of the park to myself...and boy did I have it to myself. I went to a spot that I thought I'd like waaay out in the middle of nowhere with no neighbors in sight. I set up my tent and prepared an early supper....cheese and crackers....I watched the sunset and felt the evening chill coming on. I thought that I'd slip into the tent for a little nap and then get up and do a little stargazing. This was 7:00 p.m. mind you. I woke up 12 hours later at 7:00 a.m. Saturday morning. I knew that I was tired but— come on!

Anyway, the thing that I wanted to point out was, in all of my years of camping, backpacking, climbing,

caving, canoeing, etc., I have never...not once...spent 12 hours *anywhere*, not even in a cave, where there was absolutely no sound. You always hear wind or a bird, water dripping, a rock move, leaves rustling....something! I did not hear one sound the entire time that I was at my campsite. I have never experienced that in my life. Caves come close but even there you usually hear water dripping or bats "peeping." It was eerie but in a really good, peaceful sense.

When I got up Saturday, I drove over to the Chimneys trailhead and day hiked to meet the group only to find that a couple of folks that said that they were coming on the trip didn't make it and hadn't let us know...so I could camped with the group after all....but I wasn't about to trek back to the truck, drive back to my camp and move everything into my pack and trek back. I spent the day with everyone, met some nice folks that worked in the park, and decided to spend Saturday night attempting to get a picture of a large bear that had been raiding folks at a place called Glen Springs. The park officials had actually closed Glen Springs for camping since the bear showed no fear

and had torn up a couple of empty tents in search of food. I had seen a picture of the bear and he was the largest the park folks had seen. I drove over to Glen Springs and got into the back of the truck with my camera. I wasn't particularly concerned about the bear and I was really motivated to get a picture.....but to say that my senses weren't..."sharpened" would be a misstatement. It was deathly quiet at this spot as well and I was really keeping my ears open for movement since you couldn't see past your nose in the almost total darkness. To make a long story short, do you know what it sounds like when a herd of javelinas suddenly and without warning burst through brush? Well...they sound just like a large bear coming to eat an ex-ranger and his camera. I had a nice .40 caliber Desert Eagle but it was back at camp. I almost threw \$4,000 worth of camera gear at the "bear" in my haste to save myself. I survived (as did the hogs) but I decided it was probably time to go back to camp since the hogs obviously thought that no bears were present....big bad ranger screamed like a little girl.....and swallowed his gum.....

Inside this issue:

Richard's trip report	1
Andy's trip report	2
Andy's trip report cont...	2
February trip plans	4
Pat & Bill Pics	4
February meeting date	4

Special points of interest:

- January trip to Big Bend was perfect
- February trip to Big Bend Ranch planned
- Valentine's Day meeting....bring candy for Richard.....

January 2012 Trip Report

The Chimneys - Big Bend National Park

By: Andy Price

The Permian Basin Outing Club (PBOC), made a great start on the new year at the Chimneys in Big Bend National Park. The weather was perfect with an average high of 82° and average low of 43°. A simple web search can supply you with ample data about this area. A great place to hike and camp.

Friday, January 20th: This was a back-packing trip, meaning no car camping. Everything had to be packed in for 2.4 miles to base camp. Pat Dearen was our trip leader and does so every January. As most of you know Pat is a noted author and historian. He has visited the Big Bend area since he was a child. He has studied and written about it as well. Pat and I rode down with Bill Bentley, noted cave explorer. Our conversations were rich with Pat's broad knowledge of the area and history plus Bill's experience as a caver and hiker. We stopped at Panther Junction visitor center and picked up the group permit. The ranger

told us there had been two tents destroyed by bears the previous week, and to leave all food outside our tents, which is standard practice on all camping trips. Most of the group had hiked in by 5:00. I estimate the average pack weighed from 40 to 50 pounds plus. Water of course is the real load factor. Tents were set up on the west side of the Chimneys formations. Once the tents were set up, water was drank and snacks eaten, energy levels began to increase. People realized the heavy lifting for the day was over and it was time to relax, enjoy conversation and do some nearby exploring. In no time at all I looked up at the highest point of the Chimneys and there was Jim and Jean. Jim was standing at the pinnacle gazing at the trail we had just hiked. Jim and Jean Scott are new PBOC members but not rookies to the outdoors. They are real troopers with lots of experience and positive energy.

Jim and Jean Scott scaling The Chimneys rock formation near base camp.



At dusk people began preparing dinner. The most audacious dinner was cooked by Troy Welch. He grilled and ate a thick steak. The smell was carried in the evening air for miles and into the upper stratosphere I am sure. I told him every bear for 20 miles was getting a whiff of that steak. The view was majestic from camp in every direction. The sunset in an orange painted sky over Santa Elena Canyon to the west, in a blue misty haze. I noticed several cameras in use, trying to capture that wonderful magical moment. A few of our folks could not get away from work and did not arrive at base camp until after dark. The trail was well defined and a good hikers head lamp works great.

Friday night we gathered together around a hiker's cook stove that Annaliese Scoggin had brought and a neat little lantern that Troy supplied. Conversation was about the area, history and upcoming trips. We asked Pat to tell us a ghost story. He told of a lady in white that haunts the area north of Fort Stockton along hwy 1053. She is reported to occasionally attach herself to a car passing through. Spooky stuff. Annaliese shared some interesting experiences about her job. She works for Texas Parks and Wildlife, and had been working and camping in Big Bend State Park earlier that week. During the winter months, people tend to turn in early, as we did.



Bill, Pat & Richard hanging out



Troy cooking dinner

Saturday morning began with sunrise above the Chimneys formations. Annaliese let folks know she was hiking to the "Red Ass Spring" marked by a large cottonwood tree, 1.5 miles north of camp. Pat had told us earlier about the spring. The group decided that was a good idea and followed her lead. We left out about 9:00. There is no distinct trail to the spring. We had fresh legs, the weather was perfect, good conversation and what a view. Life is good in the PBOC.



Part of the group, before beginning the days hike.

"Red Ass Spring" was a little oasis. Images of Comanche and their ponies or cowboys, getting water came to mind. We noticed a flat clear area with small blue porcelain chips and glass shards, which suggested a dwelling of some sort had been there. We noticed two deer carcasses in separate locations and a javelina carcass in the draw near the spring. Annaliese observed that one of the deer had two puncture holes in the top of the skull. She said this could be a place where mountain lion's prefer to hunt.

We took a sit down break near the spring. The spring feeds into Javelina Draw. An old stone corral was in front of the cottonwood tree, down in Javelina Draw. We congregated there and discussed the area.



Annaliese, Andrew, Pat & Bill - Cottonwood in background

During our break we discussed who would hike back in what direction. Some of the group hiked back to camp the way we had come. Malcom McElvaney stayed on at the spring. He brought a load of camera gear and wanted to use it at the spring. Most of the group chose to take Javelina Draw southwest. This is not a trail and therefore made for some rough type hiking. I heard no complaints. We noticed several types and frequent deposits of scat. We came past two seasonal waterfalls that were in the draw. Each had about a twenty foot drop, and surprisingly, a small pond of water, with numerous animal tracks. Sadly we came upon a dead owl. Annaliese told us it was a Great Horned Owl and had most likely been there for only a couple of days. Later we came upon a herd of javelina. We were not close and did not disturb them.

We stopped to take photos of the javelina. It was here that we decided to cut across and pick up the west part of the Chimneys trail. Annaliese chose to hike on to Luna's Jacal, a historic dwelling dating back to the 1800's. This was considerably farther than most of us wanted to hike. We said goodbye to Annaliese. Andrew McCarthy and Jim rotated as our trail leaders and amazingly, after a few miles of cutting cross country, got us back on the west Chimneys trail. We estimated the hike to have been eight miles plus. I considered the hike to have been moderate. Not easy, not hard. We arrived at camp about 2:00 with nice sunshine and 80 degrees. It had been a great hike with great people. Annaliese arrived a short time later and appeared to be jogging.

Petroglyphs: The Chimneys formation just south of camp had some nice petroglyphs. All of us migrated to view and enjoy it at different times. I made the climb to the site along with Andrew and Malcom. We guessed at what the symbols might be or mean. Andrew noticed what looked like bullet holes. I later wondered what century those bullet holes were made. It is humbling to be in an area that is so pristine and so close to what the Native Americans and Settlers saw and partially experience. We noticed several holes in the rock formation that appeared to be matatas, used for grinding food sources. There were numerous striations in the rock as well. Someone said most likely these were used to sharpen stone tools and or arrowheads. This is obviously an area that was well occupied by Native Americans.



Photo By Alan Parsons

Richard visiting with fellow hikers not with our group. The rock formation has the petroglyphs on the opposite side of the pinnacle across from where they are. Malcom walking away at bottom. We had rock climbing, hiking & photography at the Chimneys.

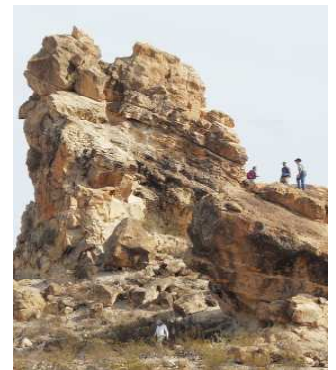


Photo By Alan Parsons

The pizza raid of 1886, oh I mean of 2012. Saturday Night: During our hike of the day one of our group conspired and drew others into her diabolical plan. I will not tell you her name to protect the guilty but I will say she works for Texas Parks and Wildlife. Yes, they plotted a pizza raid in the dark shadow of the Chimneys. They gathered at dusk and were on their way back to the trailhead where their horses/cars were waiting. Along the trail the conversation went like, I love the smell of fresh baked pizza and I am so hungry I could eat a horse. One of the bandits (Alan Parsons) lead most of the way at a blistering speed. Watch out when a bandit is hungry. One of the hombres (Andrew), hiked out with full pack and made it look easy. He had other obligations and was on the run, after he got that pizza. Pizza Fever makes folks do crazy things. They loaded up and took the 45 minute drive to the pizza place just outside of Terlingua. They gorged with no shame at all. The drive back was pleasant with full stomachs. Yes, the breakout had been worth it. No leftovers for their compadres back at camp. Such despicable behavior. What kind of people are they? Fellow PBOC members, that is who. The hike back with head lamps was brisk. We arrived at camp about 10:15.

Sunday Morning: Some of the group were up at day break and hiked out shortly thereafter. Sunday morning was different in some way. Our group kind of stayed separated, other than an occasional good morning. It seemed like we didn't want to miss out on the opportunity for solitude. People chose to hike out individually and not in pairs or groups. There is something special and peaceful about being on the trail alone and having that quiet time, hearing only the wind, birds and the crunch under your boots in rhythm with your own breathing and heart rate. There is a harmony we as humans have with nature. We don't take enough time to get away and put ourselves in a place to hear nature's melodies. Remember that is what the PBOC strives to do each month. Happy trails.



Santa Elena Canyon—taken from camp - Photo by: Alan Parsons

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Picture by Pat Dearen



Picture by Pat Dearen

February PBOC Trip

The February PBOC trip is planned for the weekend of February 17-19 and our destination is Big Bend Ranch State Park. Brandon Hawkins has agreed to lead this trip (I'll be a wedding just down the road in Marfa). Brandon needs to know the numbers so if you plan to go on this trip, please call me or email me so that I can pass the information along to Brandon. This trip has always been a good one thanks to the incredible scenery and the mild winter weather in the park (usually). If you haven't experienced Big Bend Ranch State park (not to be confused with the national park), you should plan to attend this one! Let us know soon!

February Meeting

The February PBOC meeting will be held at Murray's Deli at 3211 W. Wadley in Midland at 6 p.m. on Tuesday, February 14th (Happy Valentine's Day). We will finalize plans for the Big Bend Ranch State Park trip. Be there!



Picture by Bill Bentley



Picture by Bill Bentley