

Big Bend 2005

by Norrene Trama

On Sat. March 12 our crew left IXL for our newest adventure.... Big Bend State Park. And what an adventure it was! A long days journey into night found us at Ft. Stockton, possibly the last outpost of civilization we city slickers were to see for days. After unloading our road weary steeds in what turned out to be a very nice stabling facility the group split into two factions, one who chose to remain with the horses and begin their camp-out early and another who wanted to spend last night in comfort, sleeping in a nice motel with hot showers and soft beds. I was in the latter group. After checking into "our nice comfortable" motel, our comfort-loving group went to find a place to eat in a town that was truly gastronomically challenged to say the least.

The next morning saw the two groups converge on Wal- Mart to pick up the last few camping supplies. Then on to the Park. But first, sight-seeing in Alpine, and then Presidio for fuel. Presidio to me looked like something out of a Steven King novel, totally desolate, with only one functioning gas station that sold diesel. We converged upon the few pumps, waiting patiently for our turn, concerned that we might drain the station of all available fuel. Now we were ready to enter the Park. A warning. We knew the road within the park to our campsite would be rough. I wasn't ready for what lay ahead,—a two hour journey on an unpaved, mountainous road, that threw dust into the air so thick you couldn't see the trailer in front of you. Top speed was probably no more than 10 mph. But what beautiful scenery. The mountains were unbelievable, all off in the distance and truly majestic. The wildflowers were at their height and the blue bonnets were over a foot high in most places. There were loads of other flowers that I am not familiar with that added to the beauty of the area, exceeded only by the cacti which were all in bloom also.

When we reached the top of the mountain we found ourselves in a very nice campground, complete with ranch house, public baths and a really nice bunk house with kitchen and cooks! My kind of place! We unloaded the horses into some very nice pens, settled them in and then started to set up camp and settle ourselves in so we could do what we do best, eat and socialize. After one of our great dinners we fell into our respective rest areas to catch some zz's and get ready for our ride the next day.

Monday morning dawned clear and cold. After we and the critters were fed, we set off to explore our new found area. We did find trails, but none of us wanted to venture too far into the desert where all the cacti and wildflowers could look surprisingly the same. So we stayed close to home. That evening it was decided that if we really wanted to "see" Big Bend we needed to hire a guide. The ranger was happy to oblige our request and introduced us to Ruben, who had lived in the area most of his life. He told us he would take us to see the Waterfall, supposedly the largest in Texas, but it would take all day.

The next day those of us with a true yearning for adventure saddled up and began our trek across the desert putting our lives in the guides hands. After a few minutes I knew I was totally lost and definitely dependent upon him for my survival. Things went well on the flats, but when we got into the mountainous part things started to get hairy. We started down mountain sides that were not only very steep; they were surrounded by huge ravines that were not for the faint of heart. I have a problem with heights so I couldn't look down because I certainly would have totally lost it. With no trails to keep the horses in line we all just slid "wily- nilly" down these embankments as best we could. Some of us just white knuckled it down. We survived with no major mishaps in our search for the "Texas highest waterfall", I was never so happy to dismount in all my life. While I rested at the rest stop and watched horses the rest of the crew went on to the viewing of the waterfall. Having just recuperated from a broken ankle I didn't see myself walking over the steep uneven ground very gracefully (as if I do anything gracefully). Everyone returned with their pictures taken and we were ready to remount and ride back to our camp. What a ride it was back. While not so unnerving as the first ride, this one proved to be super long and all we did was ride, ride, and ride. We did stop to see some interesting rock formations, abandoned ranch houses, and get a short history of what had happened in the area.

I must say our guide was very knowledgeable. He also didn't know the meaning of rest stops. I finally had to beg for a stop so we could get off, stretch our legs and visit the non existent rest rooms. It's hard to find privacy when all you have is cacti to hide behind! So I just went for it! It was dusk when we returned to camp, and I don't know who was more done in, us, or the horses. I must say, the horses held up well as that was not the type of riding they are used to (being flat land horses) and I know most of us do not ride them that long at a time either. Once safely in camp, several riders, through words and actions expressed just how terrifying the ride had been for them. After dinner we had a short visitation and then crashed in our bunks. We also gave the Advil quite a work out! The ride was a long 42 miles.

Most of us spent the next days recuperating and doing short rides, and then it was time to start on our way home. Let me say that while we had communal dinners, we ate breakfast prepared by the Park cook. And could he cook. We left the Park as we had entered... driving slowly through dust and beautiful scenery at 10 miles per for two hours. We over-nighted outside Sanderson since some wanted to go back on I-10, others on Highway 90. Highway 90 gave us a view of another part of Texas that we city folk rarely see and now I know why. There wasn't much to see. Acres of nothingness save for cacti and scrub oaks. We all made it back to our respective homes safely and in due time. We all had a great time and most of us who survived the ride from hell want to do it again next year. Some of us are just such gluttons for punishment, and love it!!