



# In Search of Eldorado



## Hello to Family & Friends

What a GREAT day!! You will soon be escorting me on one of the best hikes of my life. But we will get to that soon. On the way to the Chiricahua (cheer-ah-cow-ah) National Monument I stopped at the Mustang Mall. I remember stopping here back in October on the Vendetta ride. We were on our way to Johnny Ringo's Gravesite and about 15 minutes ahead of the pack. They have some great horse and cowboy stuff in here. I did not buy anything.

I did not stop at Ringo's grave since I had been there before, also it's a red dirt and gravel and red dirt road and very muddy because of the snow. But I took the pictures below on the way.



Day 50  
  
*Saturday*  
  
*February 23rd*  
  
*Double Adobe*  
*To*  
*Willcox*  
  
Weather  
*30's & 40's and Sunny*

## Eldorado

By Edgar Allen Poe

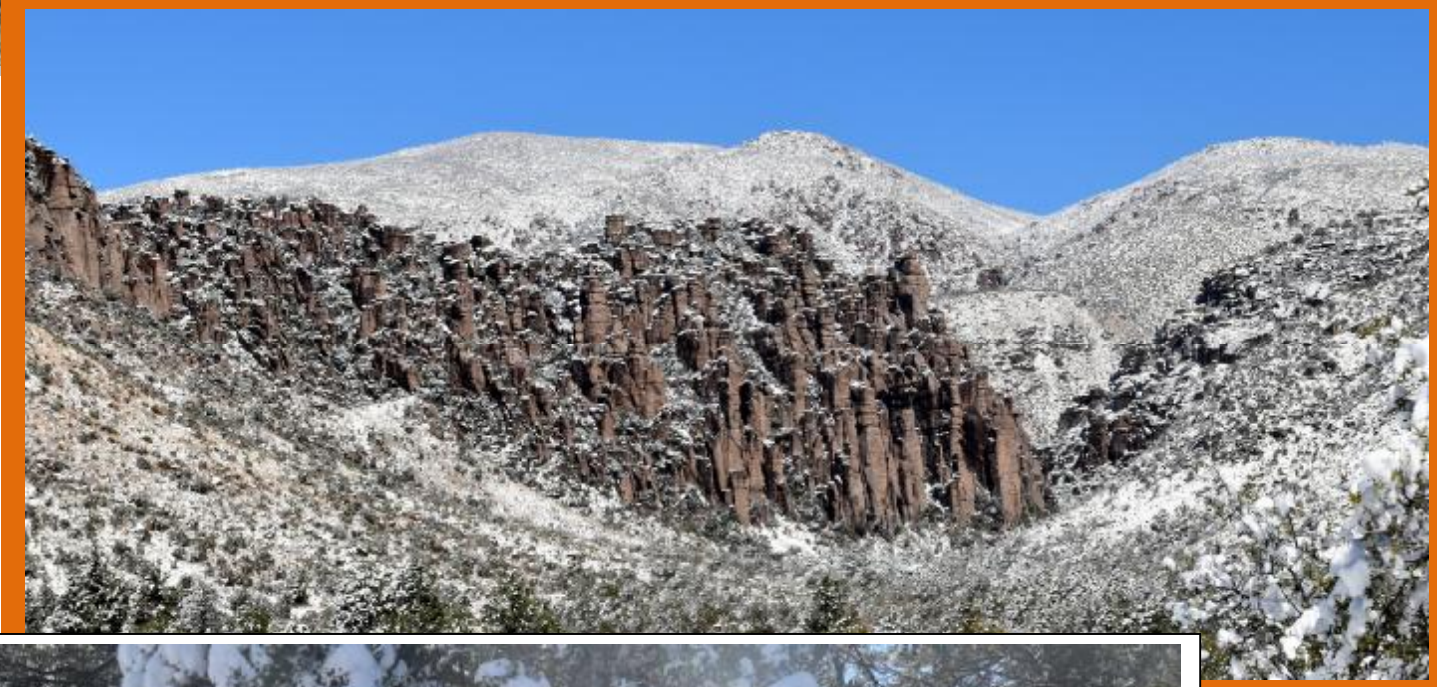
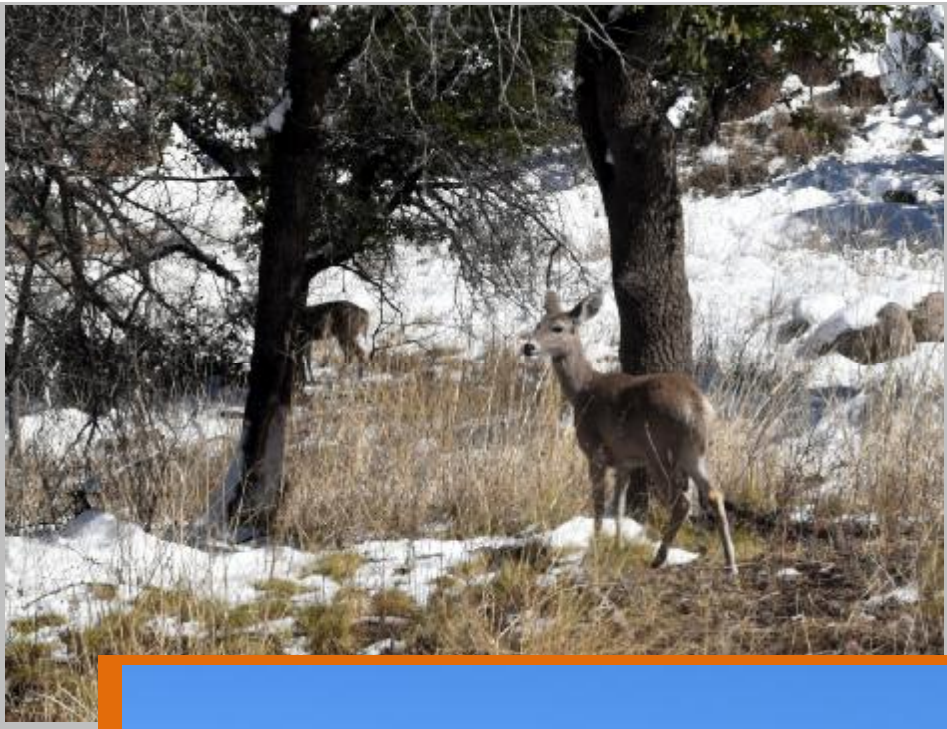
Gaily bedight,  
A gallant knight,  
In sunshine and in shadow,  
Had journeyed long,  
Singing a song,  
In search of Eldorado.

But he grew old—  
This knight so bold—  
And o'er his heart a shadow—  
Fell as he found  
No spot of ground  
That looked like Eldorado.

And, as his strength  
Failed him at length,  
He met a pilgrim shadow—  
'Shadow,' said he,  
'Where can it be—  
This land of Eldorado?'

'Over the Mountains  
Of the Moon,  
Down the Valley of the Shadow,  
Ride, boldly ride,'  
The shade replied,—  
'If you seek for Eldorado!'







Chiricahua resembles an oceanic archipelago - a sea dotted with islands - only here the sea is hot desert grassland. We call these isolated mountain ranges "sky islands". The Sonoran and Chihuahuan deserts, and the Rocky Mountain and Sierra Madre ranges all meet here. The convergence of these four biomes makes this area unusually rich in biodiversity.

Chiricahua National Monument was established in 1924 to protect the fantastic rock formations known as "the pinnacles." In 1934 the Civilian Conservation Corps began the job of improving the road and constructing the trails and many park structures, including the visitor center in front of you!



This is right across the road from the VC. There is an eight mile scenic drive from the VC to Massai Point which, I found out, is closed due to trees being down (the heavy snow). But the Ranger pointed out the Silver Spur Meadow Trail which had lots of tracks and little elevation change. I thanked her but wanted more. I noticed that several people were leaving the parking lot via the Lower Rhyolite Canyon Trail. That one will be crowded and wet.



My choice? Just because the road is closed to vehicles does NOT mean it is closed to hikers. Water, snacks, stocking cap, hiking poles, ready to go. I felt a little foolish at first with the hiking poles. After all, who needs hiking poles on a road? But I sure am glad I had them. Shadowed areas were still icy and slippery. I think those poles kept me from slipping and falling at least a dozen times, especially on the way down.

But this hike is about the scenery, so enough talk. A picture is worth a thousand words. Enjoy!



## Columns, Pinnacles and Balanced Rocks

*Thousands of naturally sculptured rocks line the walls of these canyons.*

Millions of years ago, the volcanic bedrock here was uplifted to form the Chiricahua Mountains. As the mountains gradually rose, rock layers were tilted slightly to the west. The force of these events caused layers to shatter, creating deep vertical cracks called **joints**.

Since that time, water has been penetrating the cracks, dissolving minerals and washing away softer portions of rock. Expansion and contraction due to temperature changes, and the wedging of ice and plant roots in cracks, contribute to the breakdown of rocks. The weathering of softer layers leaves the harder layers to stand out in relief, producing rock formations with unusual shapes.

Erosion will continue as long as there are rain, ice, wind, plants, and temperature changes. As today's rock formations weather away, others will be exposed to take their places.



As rocks weather and erode, joints widen and cavities form along zones of weakness. Unusual columns, "totem poles," and balanced rocks result from continuing erosion. The formations are made of rhyolite, a dense, fine-grained rock of volcanic origin.





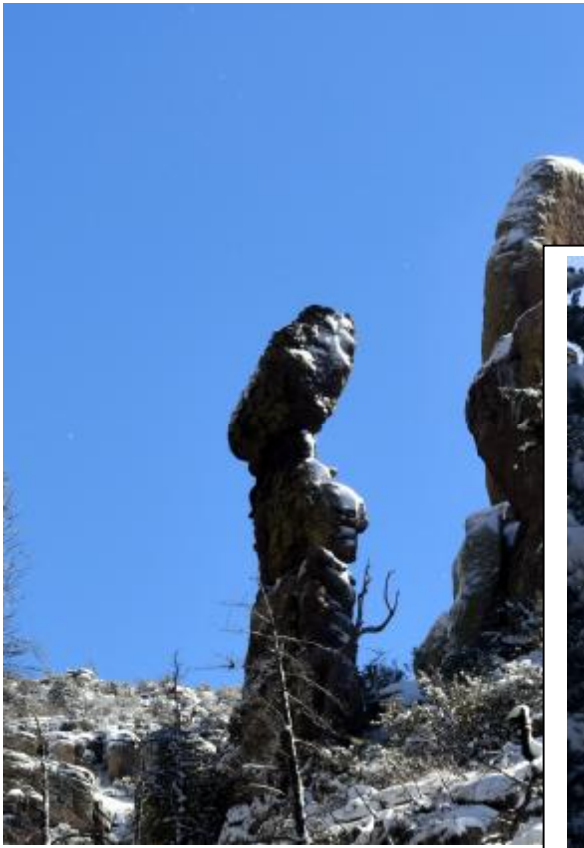


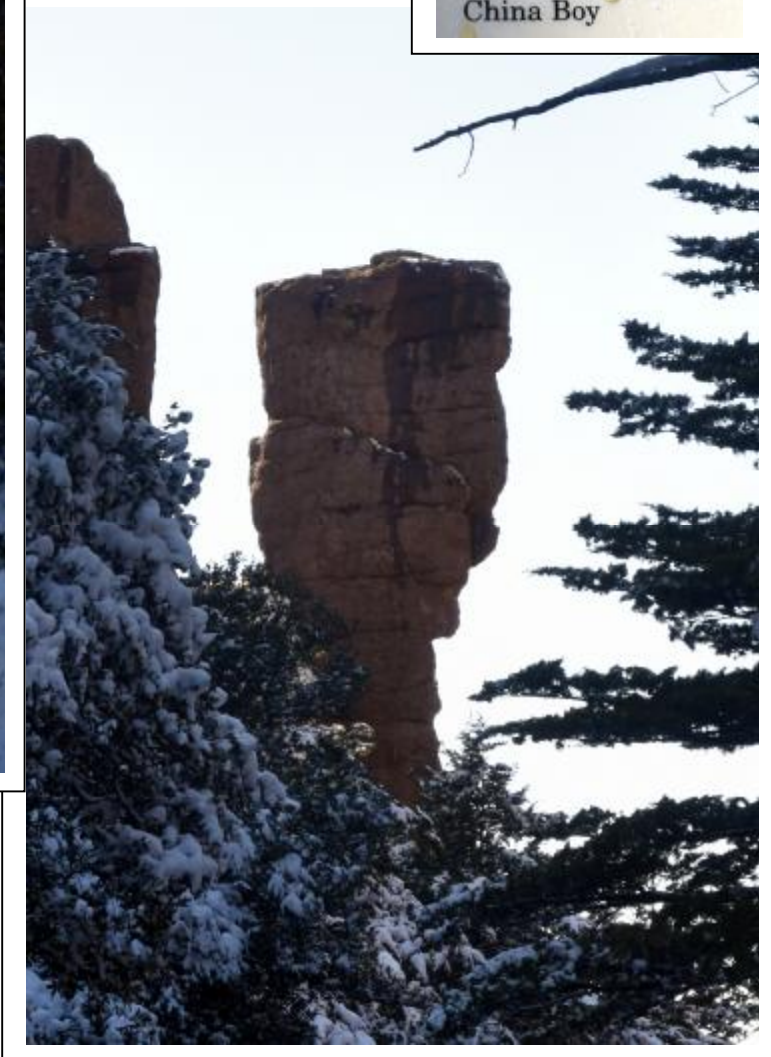
The boulder above stuck out far enough the RV could have hit it while driving by.

There must have been a small fire here, although there was evidence of a widespread fire farther up the road. Note the two black stumps and the way the branches are gone from nearby trees.









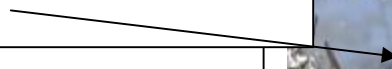








If you look really, Really, REALLY, closely at this photo you can see specks of light. This is the sun shining through small bits of snow as they rain from the tree. It looked a lot better than it turned out.



Even though some of those pictures above were taken on the way back down, I saved the best for last. There was a turnout at the 6300 foot elevation, so I had climbed roughly 800 feet from the RV. I stopped to have a snack and some water and decided to just go around the next bend, it looks like it opens up over there (that's a common golf comment after an errant shot – It's ok, I think it opens up over there). It did open up, and I couldn't stop. Enjoy!









Why was this one of the best hikes of my life? I always felt it was wrong hiking on asphalt through the woods, but I noticed today that I did not have to keep my eyes on the trail, I was on a road. I spent 90% of the hike looking at the scenery and only 10% at the road ahead, mostly where it was icy. Since the road was closed I was all by myself, no one in front of me and I didn't care if anyone was behind me. And the silence. All I could hear was the click.....click.....click.....click of my hiking poles, an occasional bird, and the sometimes babbling of the Bonita Creek as it tripped it's way over a boulder or two in the streambed. When I stood in the sun to take those fantastic photos above, there was no wind, no sound, just me and the beauty of the land in front of me. Seeing it with the touch of snow was an amazing plus. There were spots on the way up where I took pictures that looked boring on the way down once the snow had melted. Plus the fact that now it was all downhill on the way back.

I'm glad you could join me

Since the drive is eight miles and I was not too far from the top, I figured I must have walked about 5-6 miles when I turned around. I didn't think I could beat the view I already had, so why go on. Back in the RV I checked the mileage. They must measure the drive from the park entrance and not 3 miles further on from the visitor center. I had only gone 3.6 miles. If I had known I only had another mile to the top, I probably would have pushed on, cause I felt good. But that makes a 7.2 mile hike today with no ill effects and that feels good.

I waved to four snowplows as they passed me. Then a crazy Ranger in a little Toyota that I almost didn't get out of the way of, and a couple not too far from the road closed gate, that was it.

I debated visiting the Faraway Ranch, but it was getting late. I found a campground in Willcox, about 30 miles away. I want to visit Fort Bowie and maybe go back to the Chiricahuas tomorrow. I would like to drive to the top.

Until next time.....