



In Search of El dorado

A daily journal of my travels and adventures in my.....Search for Eldorado

Hello to Family & Friends

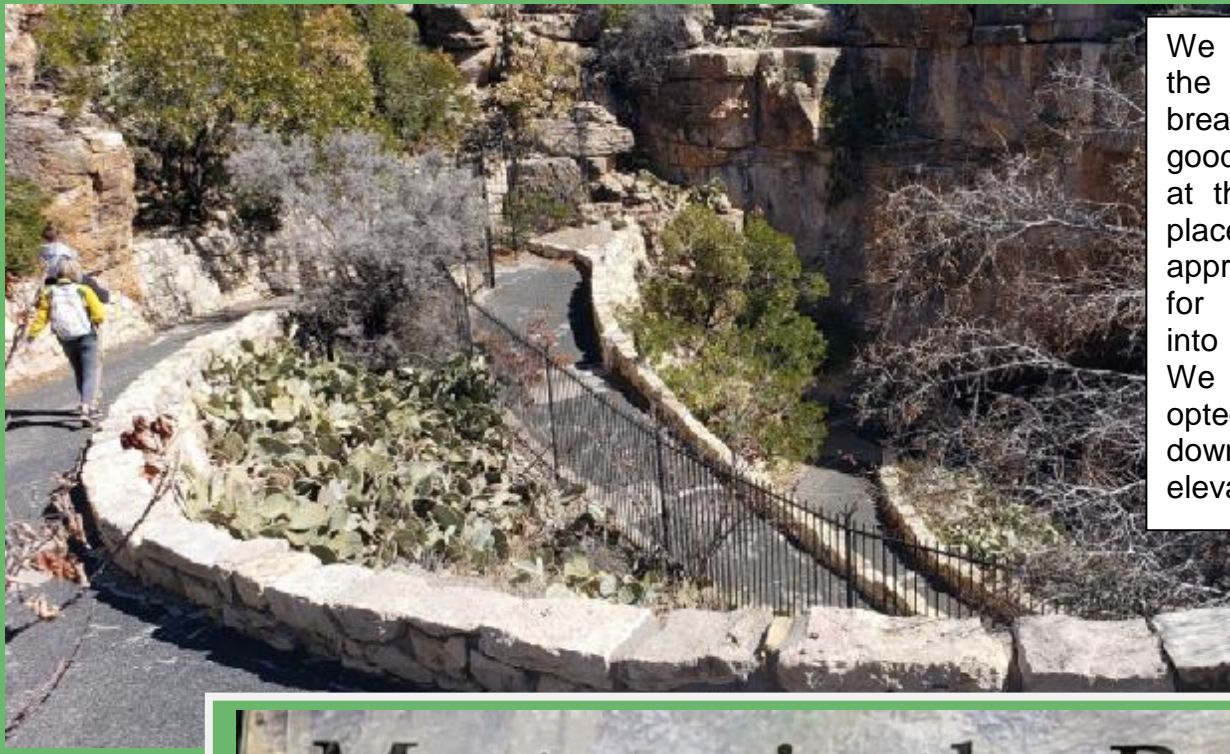
Thursday, March 18th 2021 Day 60



Around 10:30 p.m. we drove back into the park and up to the VC and took a look around. There were a couple cars still there and at least one RV. What the hey, we were already illegally parking overnight in a National Park. If they kick us out, it's just seven miles back to the entrance where we had spent the last few hours.



By 11 p.m. we were both asleep. I awoke at 4:07 to use the facilities, hopped back into bed, and by 4:15 could hear the sounds of RV's and cars making their way through the parking lot. The Ranger was absolutely correct, people were starting to line up at 4 a.m. I never did fall back asleep and Morgan's alarm got us up at 6 a.m. I sent her back to her warm bed, dressed appropriately for the 37 degree temp outside, and made my way to the end of the line. At 6:15 a.m. I was somewhere around number 400 in line. How do I know this? A young lady was bored and was going down the line asking each group how many tickets they needed. At 7:00 Morgan relieved me in line and I went back for a nap. A text from Morgan at 7:42 told me she had a placeholder for two adults at 11 a.m. Yeah! I wandered down around 8:00 and shortly thereafter we joined the line inside the VC. That's when I went back outside and took the top photo, with about 50% of the line, or 500 people, now inside the VC. The photo above is the line inside. If you could blow up this photo, you would be able to see about two inches of Morgan's forehead. Ha ha.



We went back to the RV, ate breakfast, had a good talk and met at the appropriate place at the appropriate time for our descent into the cavern. We of course opted for the hike down and not the elevator.

Mystery in the Rock

To your right, layers of limestone tilt upward in an inverted V-shape. Two geologists first described this compression structure in 1950 when they were studying the Capitan Reef. They coined the term “tepee” because of the shape, but noted “the cause of the buckling is not apparent.” The origin of these rare rock structures is a mystery. To solve it, geologists must find modern tepee structures. Although similar structures have been found, none match the size and detail of the ones found here in the Guadalupe Mountains. Today, there are many hypotheses, but the mystery remains.



Natural Entrance Trail

Strenuous Hike—75 Stories



Distance: 1.25 miles Distancia: 2 kilómetros
Elevation Change: 750 feet Desnivel: 245 metros

Everything we read and everything the Ranger told us, indicated it would take an hour to make the hike down. So when we arrived at the bottom after only thirty minutes, I was just a little surprised. There are sights to see and info boards to read during the descent, and we did visit a few as you will see, but the best stuff is in the big room.

Below – the daunting switchback into the black hole.

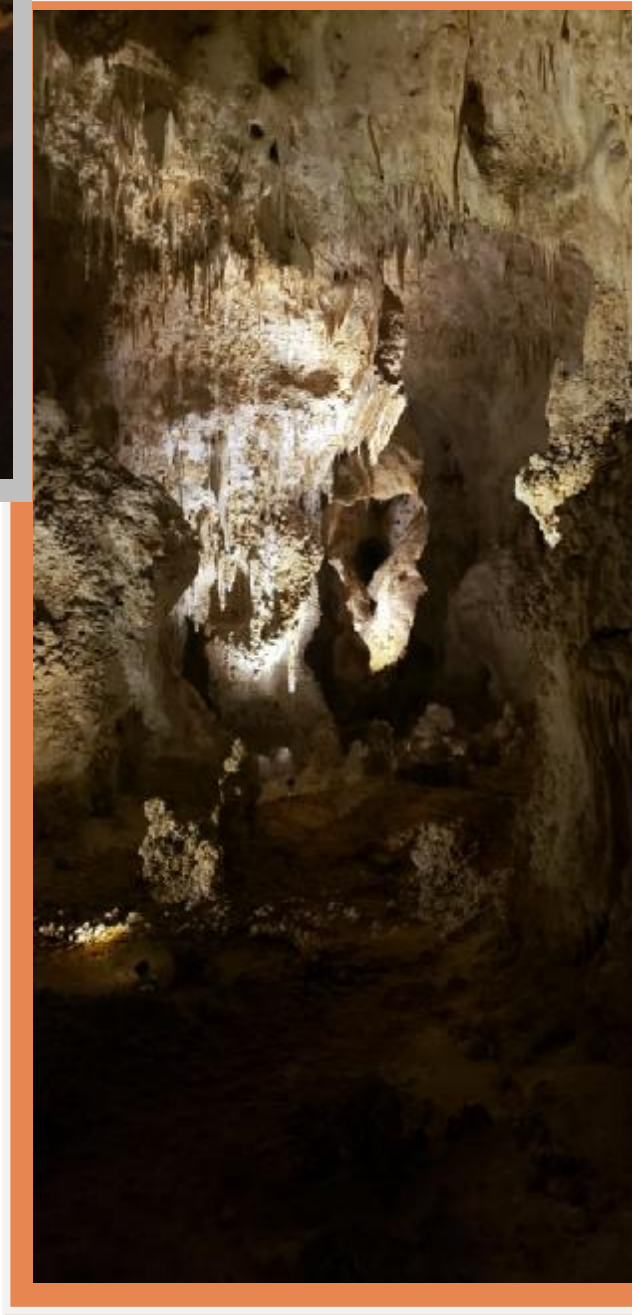
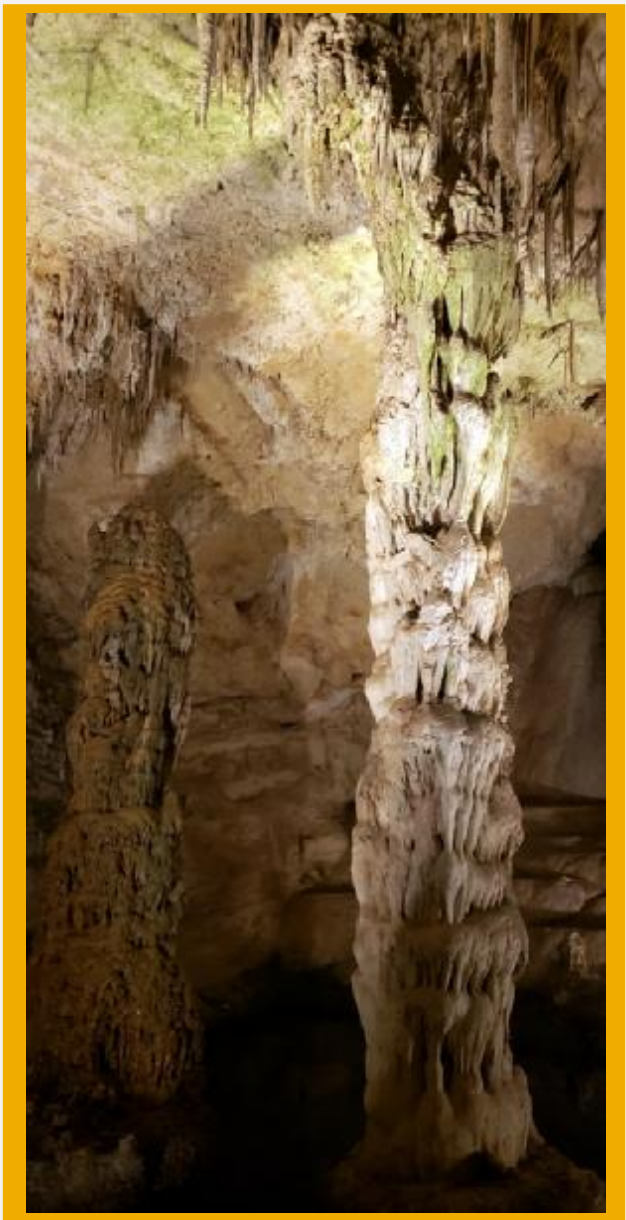




It has been said that 'a picture is worth a thousand words', with that in mind I will let the pictures do the talking and keep my trap shut, at least for awhile.

The Black Hole

One evening in 1898, a massive swarm of bats spiraled into the dusty pink sky. Teenage cowboy Jim White watched the bats in awe. "Must be a whale of a big cave," he breathed. The boy crept along the cactus and peered over the brink. He lit a dry stalk and dropped it down into the hole. The glowing embers twirled almost 80 feet (24 m) before striking the rock below. Now it was his turn. Jim returned with a lantern and a ladder he made with fencing wire and sticks. He used these to overcome the 36-foot (11 m) drop you see ahead.



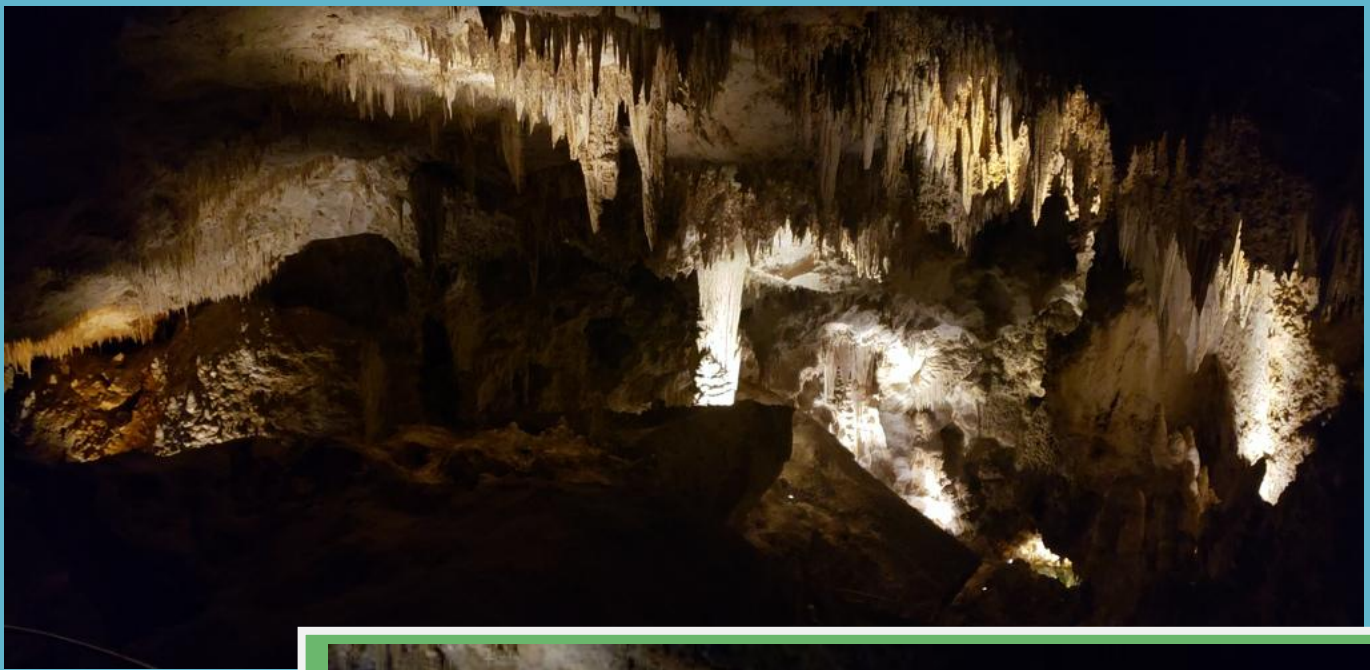


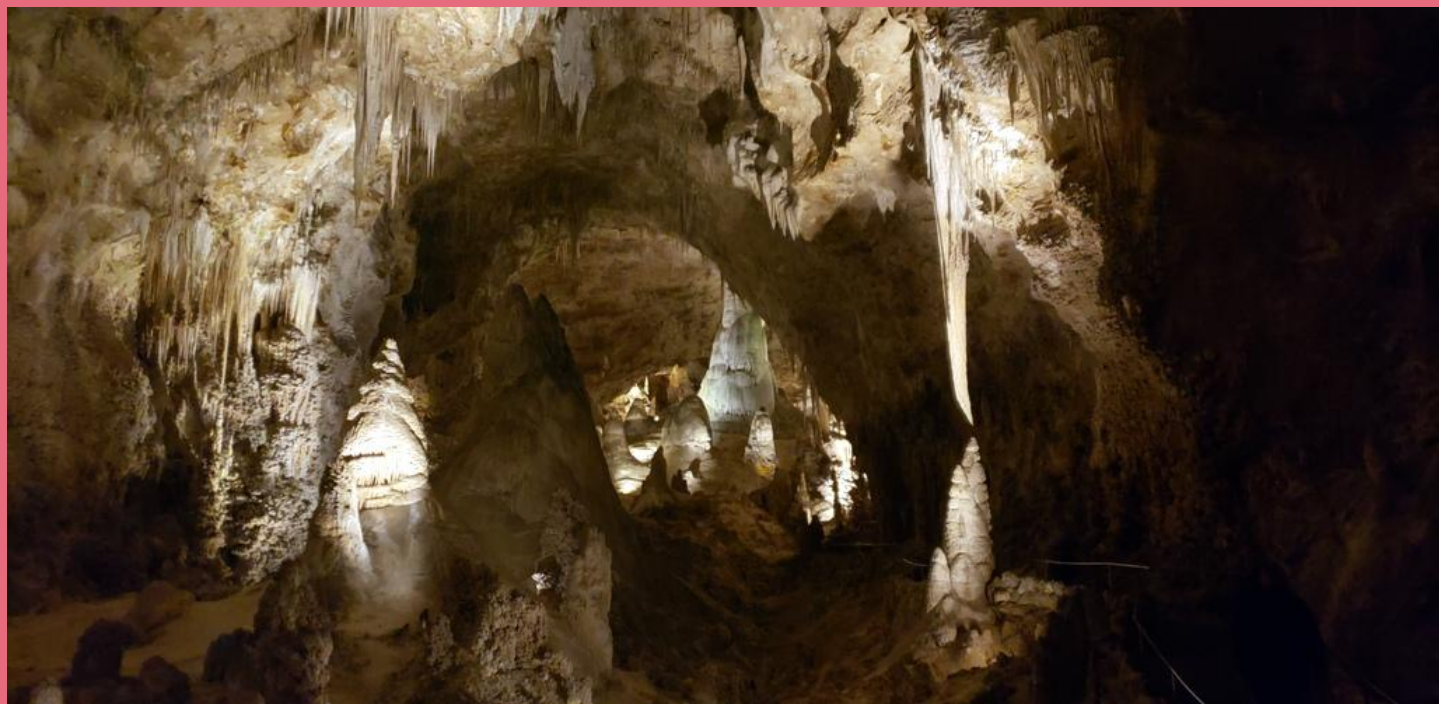
The people here provide a size perspective.

Record Breaker

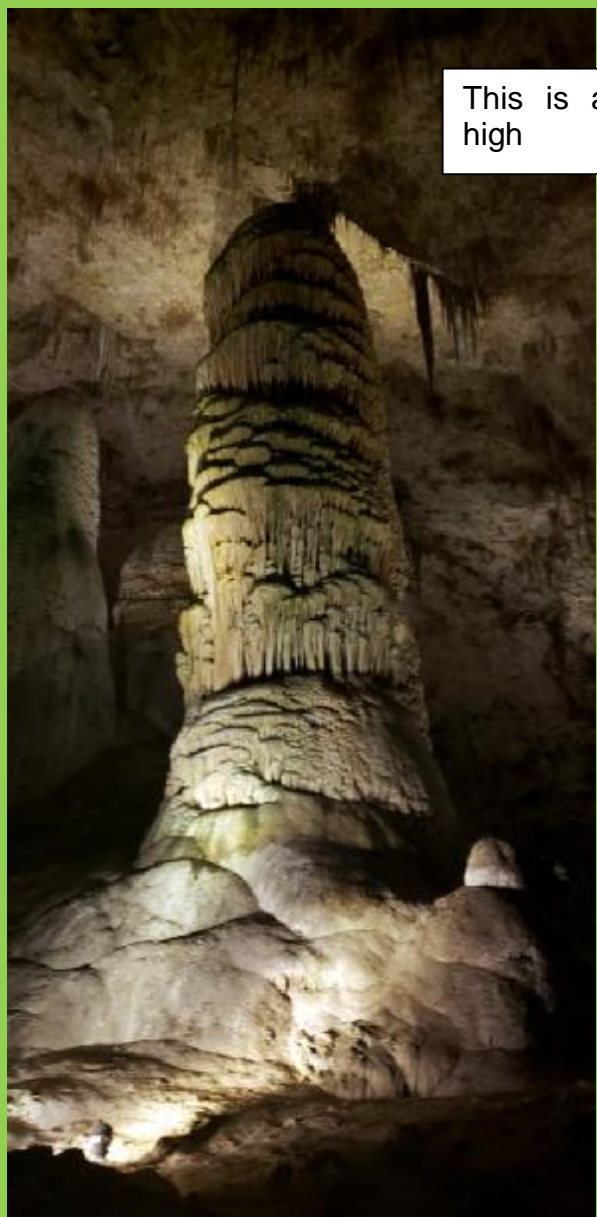
Weighing about 200,000 tons (180,000,000 kg), Iceberg Rock is the largest piece of ceiling, called breakdown, to fall in Carlsbad Cavern. But don't worry, falling rock is unlikely to occur again. Roof collapse is a natural process of cave development, but it eventually stops. When the ceiling reaches an arch shape, like a bridge, it can support the weight of rock above the cave.

Look up in the ceiling. You can see a fissure that continues into the Big Room after you go around and under Iceberg Rock. Surface water traveling down this fissure loosened the rock. When it broke free, it hit the sloped floor, slid downhill, and rotated counterclockwise. Iceberg Rock hit the back wall with such force that a section of the King's Palace ceiling below broke off.

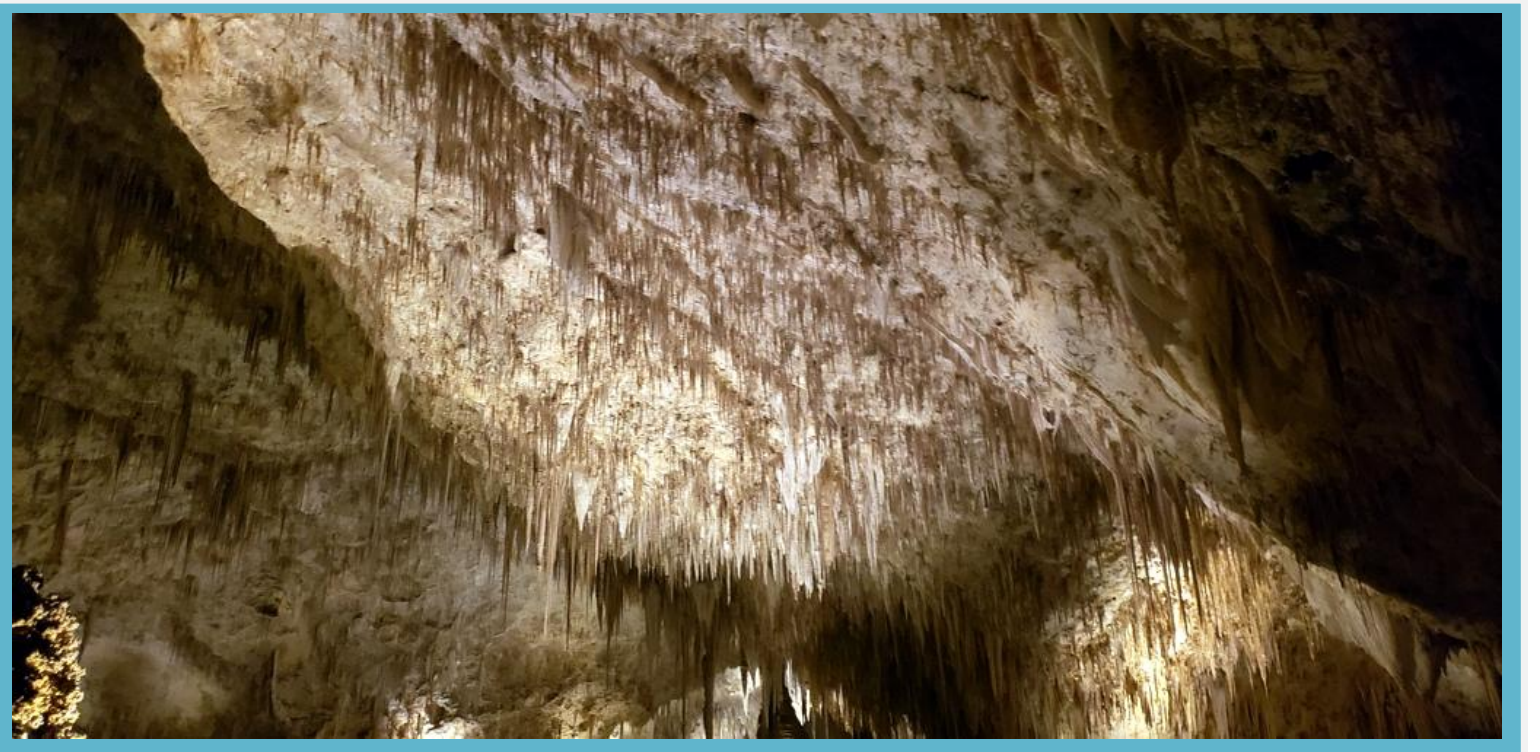




This is about 40 feet high



Lions Tail
Stalactite and popcorn





Ancient Shorelines

The smooth, flat calcite floor around the edge of the pool is called shelfstone. It marks water levels of the past. Shelfstone starts out as paper-thin sheets of calcite that form on the surface of a quiet pool and float like rafts. These rafts can become attached to the edge, creating a platform. As water flows down the cave walls or stalagmites and into the pool, the rafts become thicker as they grow outward toward the center.



Temple of the Sun

Columns, stalagmites, and stalactites



A vast network of dark passages and secret rooms beckon just beyond our reach. But in 1985, a small team of cavers used helium balloons to lift a climbing rope high into the dome. With patience, ingenuity, and a bit of luck, they snagged a lofty stalagmite after several tries. Their ascent revealed a large passage above the Big Room they named Spirit World, a place where few have since stood. In 2014, cavers climbed into a still higher level that they named Halloween Hall. What wonders high above our heads still wait to be revealed?

Up, Up, and Away!



Dangling in the Dark

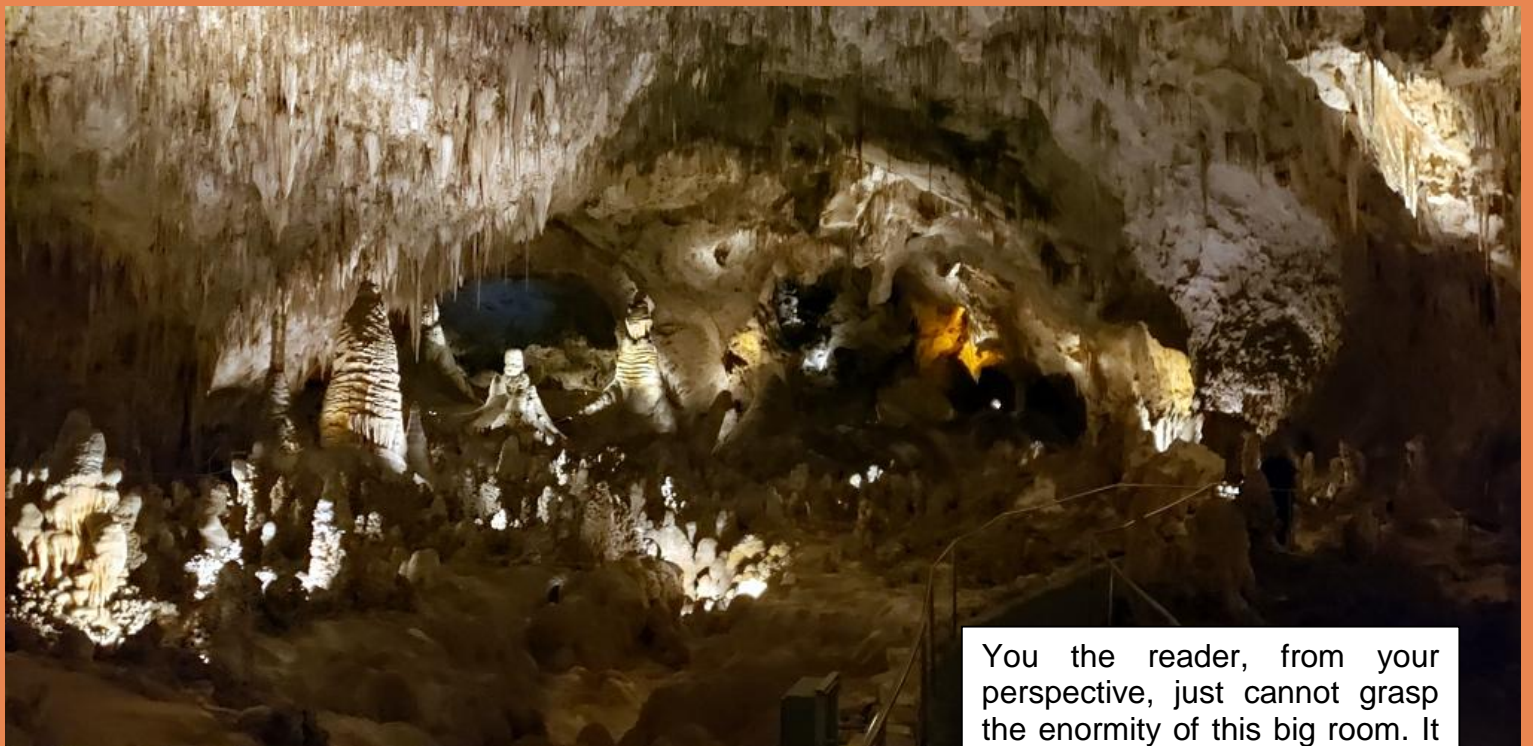


See that ladder of fence wire and sticks? It was made by Jim White, an early explorer. Imagine climbing down into Lower Cave as the ladder swayed above the dark pit. Dr. Willis T. Lee did just that in 1924. Lee's photo expedition with the National Geographic Society covered many miles, revealing new tunnels and rooms. It followed Lee's first expedition a year earlier, which led to the establishment of Carlsbad Cave National Monument on October 25, 1923.

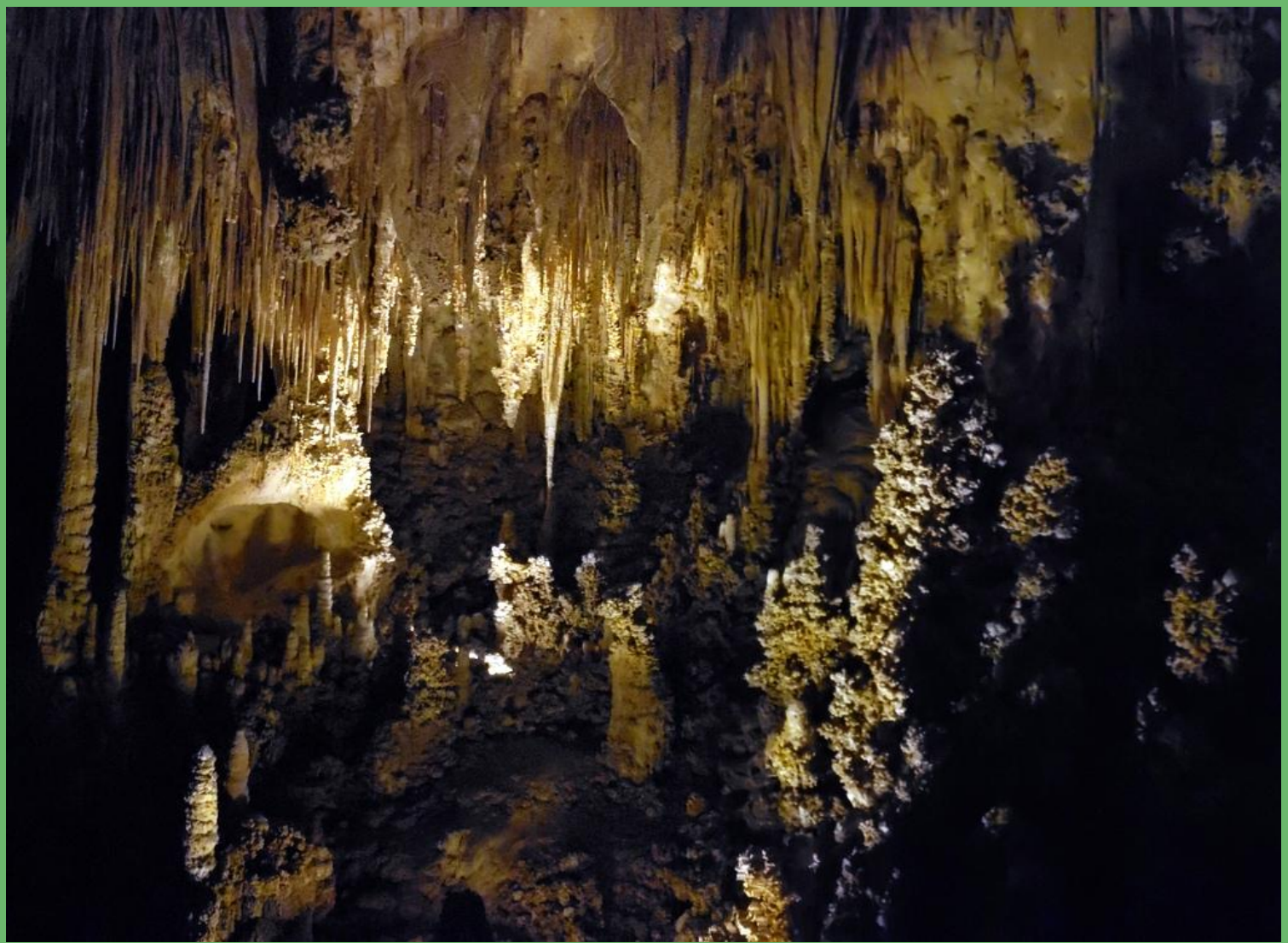


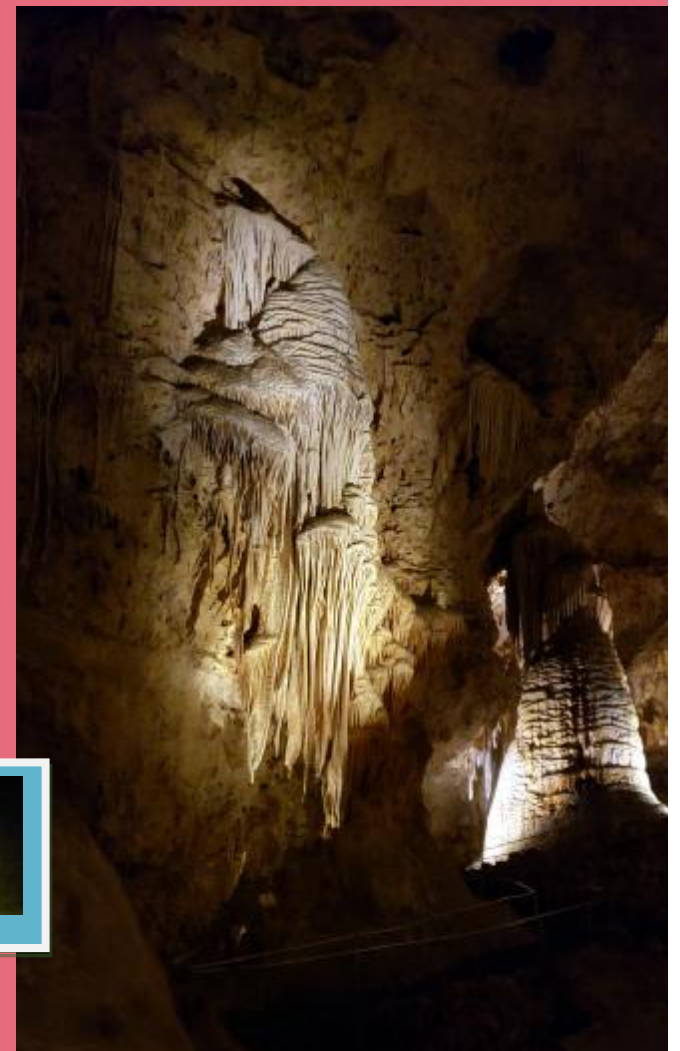
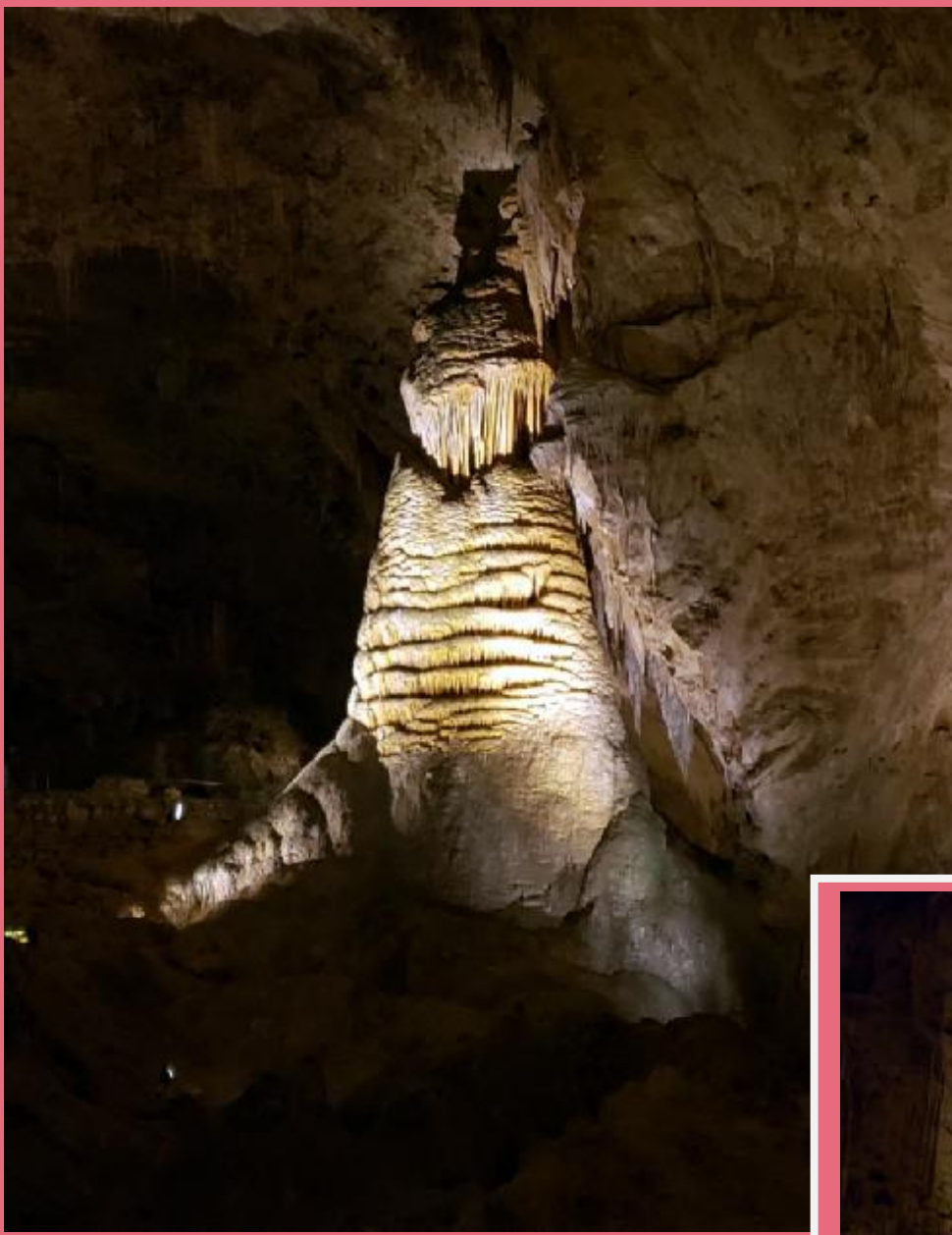


The photo does not do justice to the real thing



You the reader, from your perspective, just cannot grasp the enormity of this big room. It is six football fields in size and averages about ninety feet high.





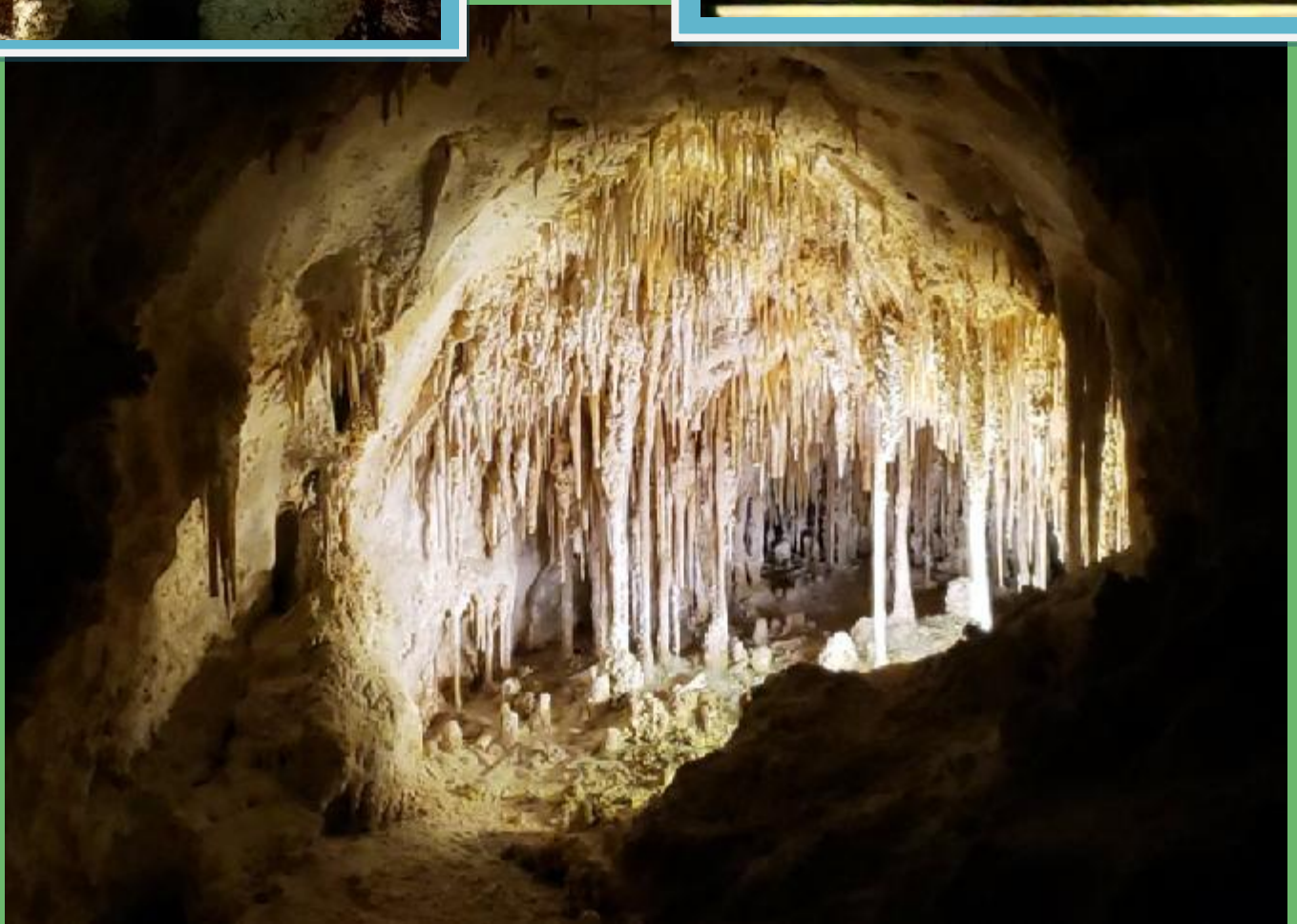
Rock of Ages
Column



I have to explain the one to the left a little bit. We are standing on a bridge overlooking a pool of water. Every now and then a single drop sends ripples across the pool. The water is so clear it looks like there isn't any. The shelf that lines the edge looks like a miniature modeling of cliffs along a riverfront. I told Morgan it looked like a scene from a Disney movie, or right out of Storybook Gardens at Disneyland.

Dolls Theater

Soda straws and small columns





This is the restaurant/deli/snack bar/ whatever you want to call it. It has been here since the 20's when it took four hours to get down into the cave and they sold cigars and brown bag lunches. There was even an idea of blasting a hole for auto tours. Go figure that one.



It's a little hard to decipher in a photograph, but, here goes. From the top – the black arrow is the VC; the black dots arrow is the elevator; the black dash arrows are the natural entrance hike down; the white arrows are the Big Room; the yellow arrow is the lower room, not accessible to the public. The path around the Big Room is about 1.5 miles.

Jim White

The Chief Explorer

I am finally able to give you the discovery, sort of, of the cavern. The bats will not be back until April.



"I crept between cactus until I lay at the brink of the chasm, and looked down. During all the year I'd known of the place, I'd never taken the trouble to do this. There was no bottom in sight! I shall never forget the feeling of aweness it gave me."

—Jim White

While he was not the first person to discover the cave, Jim White was certainly its greatest promoter and explorer.

In 1898, at the age of 16, Jim White noticed a black cloud billowing from the ground. When he went to investigate, he discovered a swarm of bats emerging from a large hole in the ground.

He returned several days later with rope, wire, and lanterns. Over the next 45 years, Jim White would spend his life exploring the cave and supporting its use.



We saw this boulder which took a personal interest in the info board of this turnout, or maybe had some garbage to get rid of. Morgan thinks it happened a while ago and now I think I agree, any road damage has been repaired.



This time Morgan and I each get our own picture.



I found out another interesting item while here – Lechuguilla Cave is within this National Park. At 138.3 miles it is the eighth longest explored cave in the world and second deepest in the U.S. Only scientists and researchers are allowed entry.

We headed back to Guadalupe for some additional info and to find a parking spot close by for the night. I think we will be trying to find a parking spot near the trailhead early tomorrow morning so we can get started up the mountain by eight or nine. We overheard a guy at the VC who had just finished the summit telling us how nice it was to see the sunrise from up on the mountain. I'm not sure that's such a big deal. With the sun rising over the desert, does it really matter if you are a couple thousand feet higher in the air? It's the same desert, the same horizon, just a little before everyone else.

After a little back and forth, per Morgan's suggestion, and the thought of a decent signal, we are parked in the VC lot. Tune in tomorrow to see if we stay here all night.

Smoked sausage, peppers, onions, garlic and sliced potatoes for supper, chocolate chip cookie dough for desert.

Tomorrow I will attempt what is known as, a slow death by hiking up a mountain. Lots of water, a pain pill, and both hiking poles. Maybe tomorrow, Morgan will have to type the newsletter.

Wish us a safe return.

Until next time.....