



In Search of El dorado

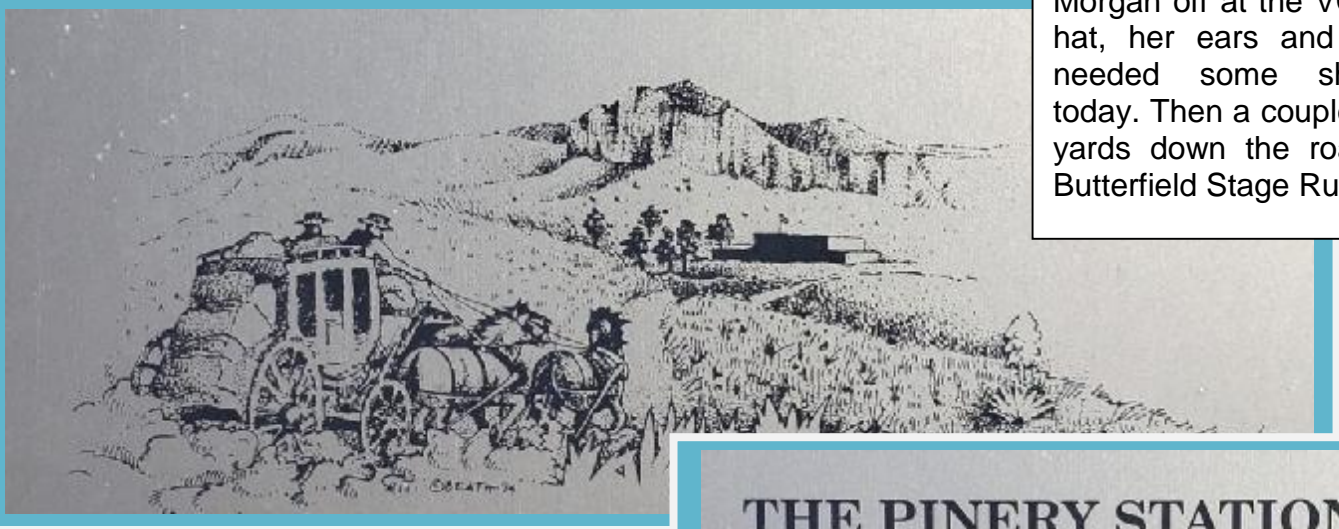
A daily journal of my travels and adventures in my.....Search for Eldorado

Hello to Family & Friends

Saturday, March 20th 2021 Day 62

BUTTERFIELD OVERLAND MAIL THE PINERY STATION

We had pancakes & sausage for breakfast. Then I dropped Morgan off at the VC to get a hat, her ears and forehead needed some shade for today. Then a couple hundred yards down the road to the Butterfield Stage Ruins.

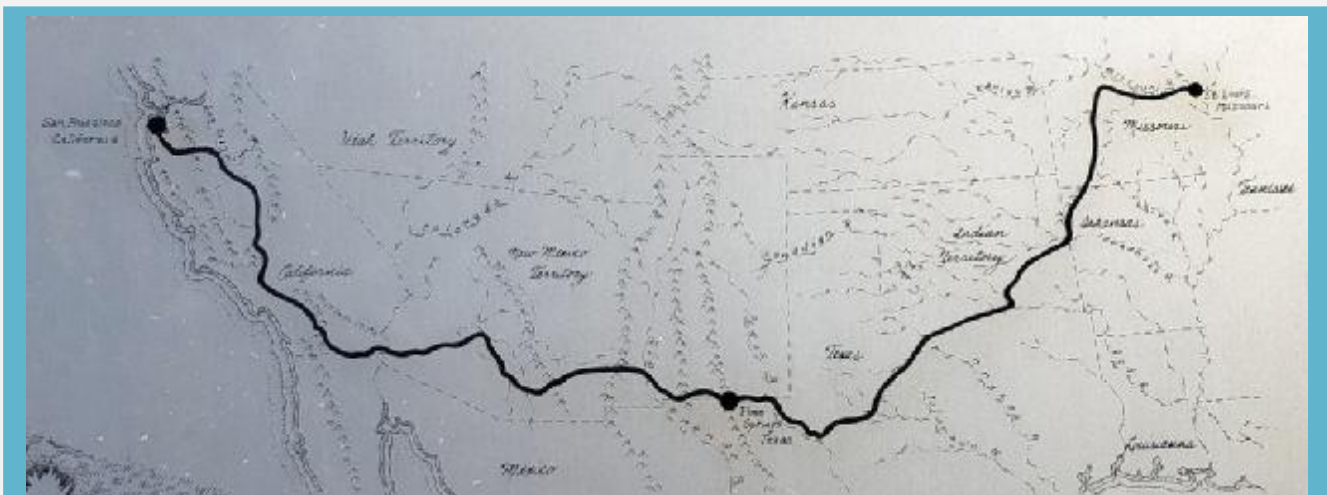


This is our last day in Guadalupe Mountains National Park.

Looking at the map below, this definitely does not seem like the most efficient route from St. Louis to San Francisco, but it does avoid going through the Rocky Mountains and any passes that may be closed by snow.

THE PINERY STATION

Pinery Station, named for the surrounding stands of pine, has the distinction of being the only ruin of an original company-built, Butterfield station standing in close proximity to a national highway. At 5,700 feet in elevation, it was also the highest, and was especially attractive because of its excellent grazing land and dependable water sources.





There is also the Frijole Ranch ruins, but I've seen plenty of ranches, you don't often get a chance to see a stage stop.



RUINS OF
"THE PINERY" OR
"PINE SPRING" STAGE STAND

BUILT IN 1858 AS A STATION ON THE BUTTERFIELD OVERLAND MAIL ROUTE ST. LOUIS TO SAN FRANCISCO • ABANDONED IN 1859, WHEN THE LINE WAS SHIFTED TO THE DAVIS MOUNTAIN ROUTE

Not much left, and it's supported by the wood braces.



This 'ruin' appeared much more modern, with no binding material between the stonework. That's a doorway in the middle.



Our last hike is McKittrick Canyon. Once again, while standing next to each other, one phone was on Mountain time and the other on Central. This puts the photos out of sequence, but not as bad as yesterday.

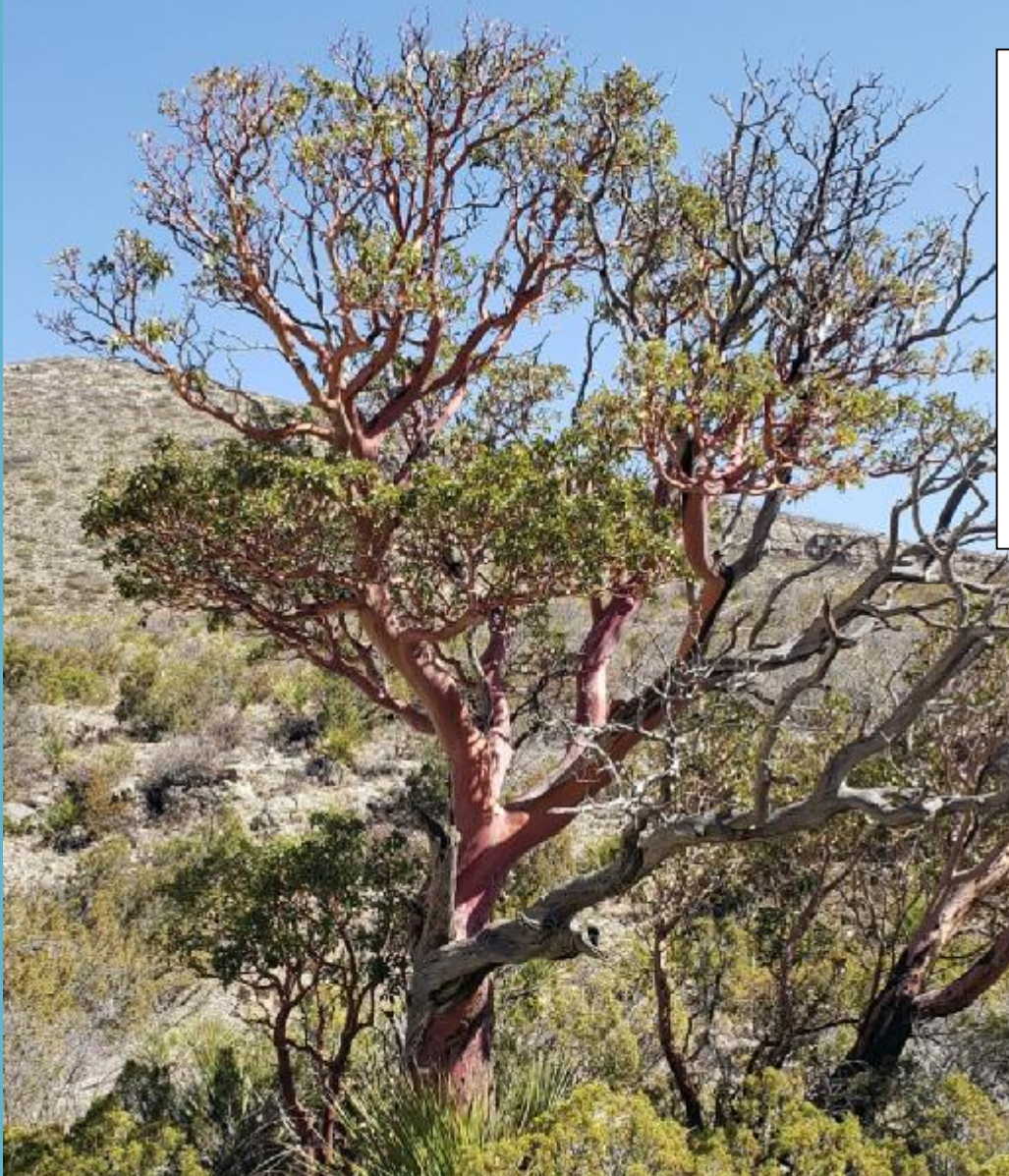
This turned out to be a fairly rocky trail, not as bad as the one in Amistad NRA, but it was a little rough on Morgan's feet since her hiking boots were still shaking off the dust of Big Bend NP almost eighteen months ago. With Covid she has been working from home and not getting much in the way of walking/hiking exercise.





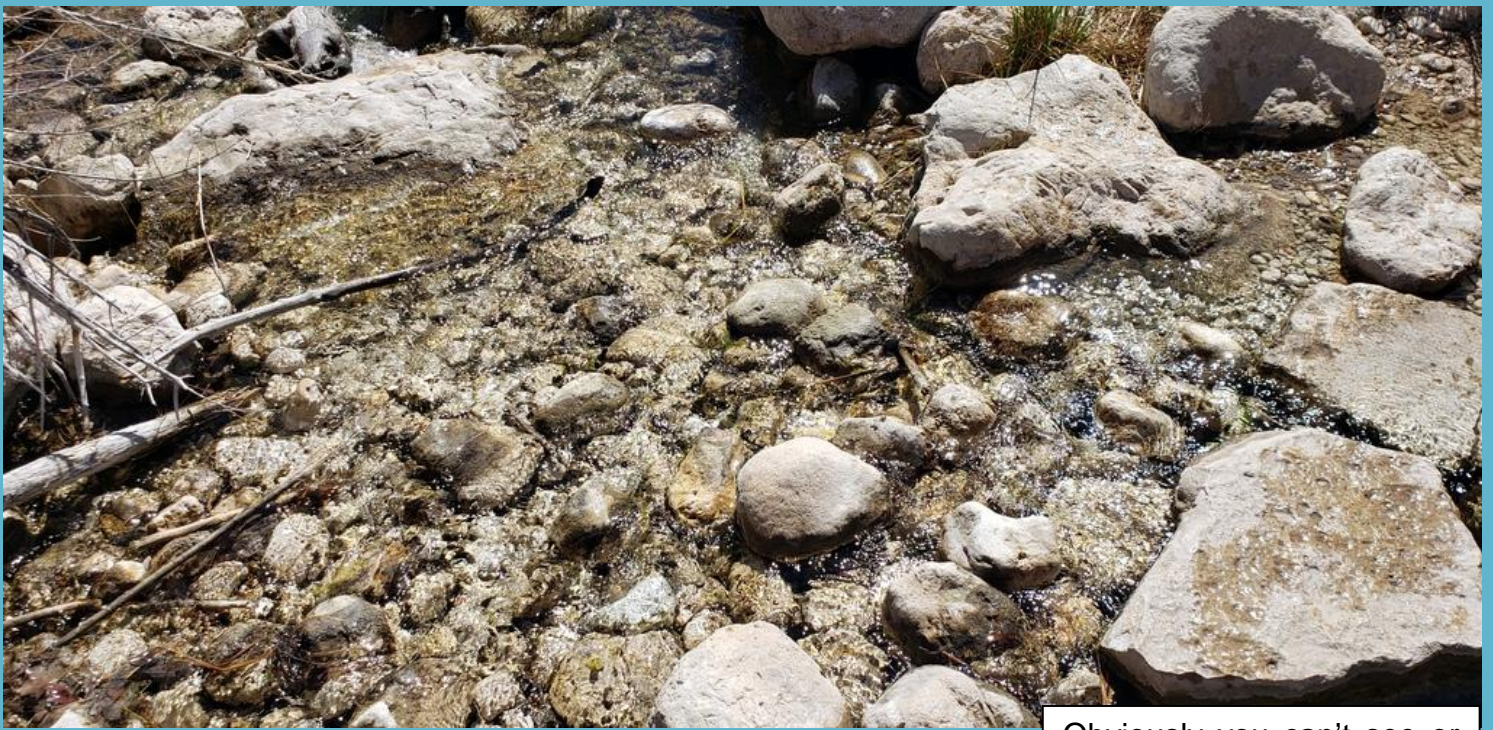
Along this lower portion of the canyon, no water in the river bed here by the way, there were these large slabs of slate. I think there are some photos later of how these slabs were used as tables, benches, and roofing materials.

The tree to the left has red bark, similar to trees I saw on a hike in Arizona.

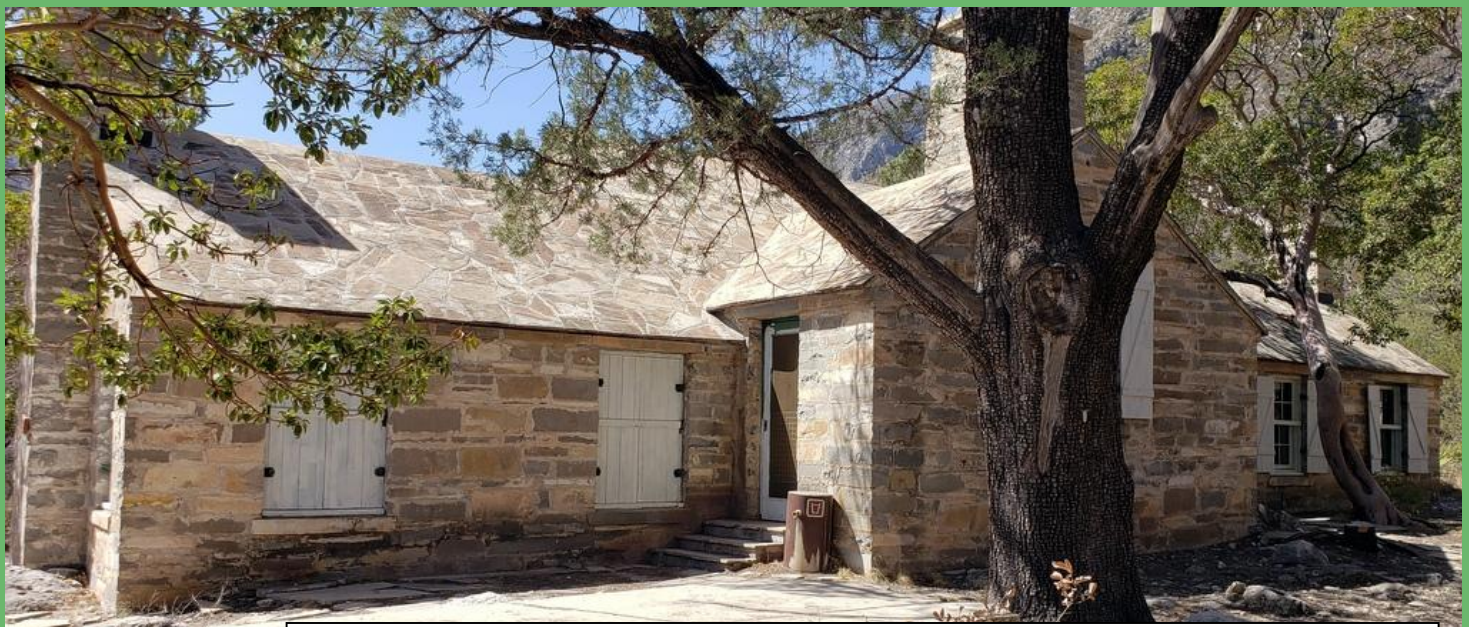


I am beginning to think Morgan is correct that Dr Seuss took inspiration from these desert palms. This looks like a family of thing-a-ma-jigs or whatcha-ma-callits.

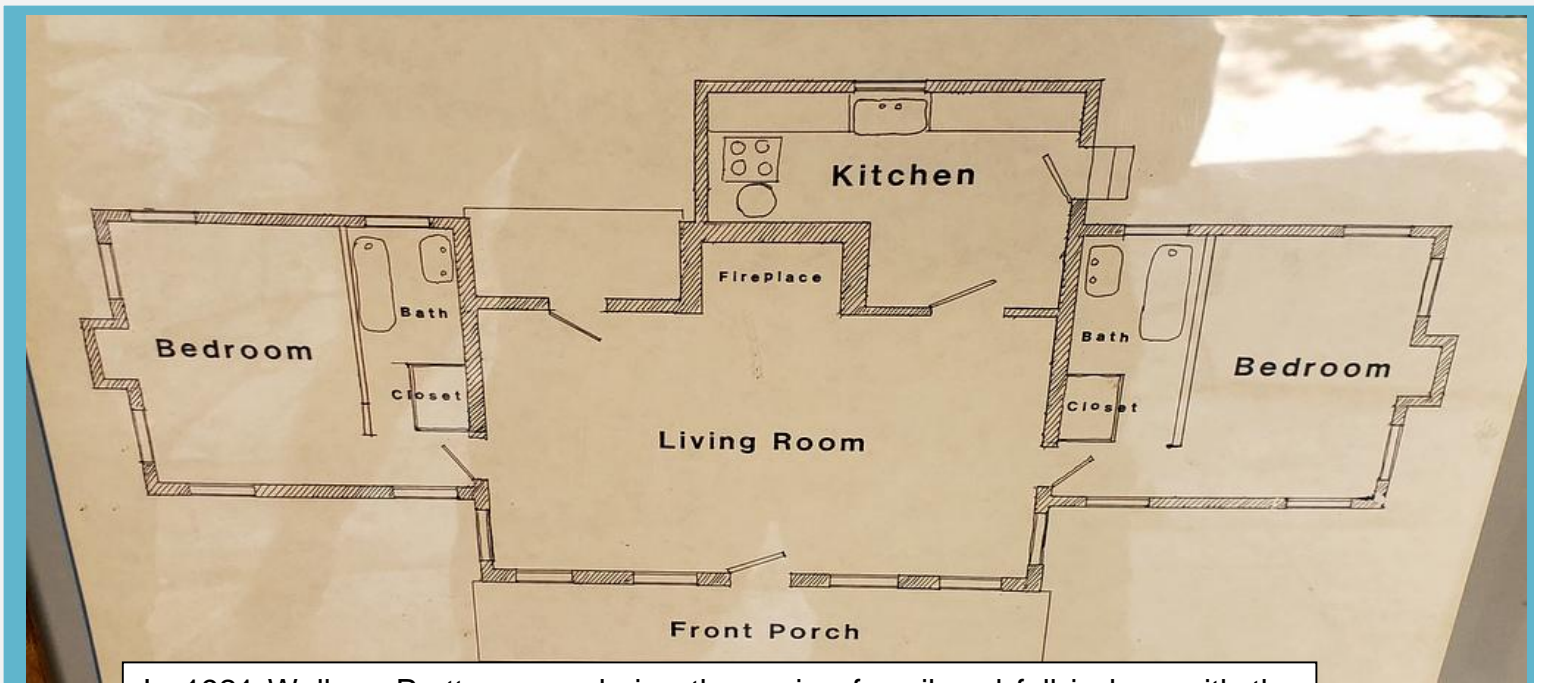




Obviously you can't see or hear the running water, but the white sparkles are the result of sun reflecting off of the babbling brook.



One of the first settlers, who worked cattle in the area in the 1870's, was Felix McKittrick, so I am guessing that the canyon is named after him. The first permanent ranch house in the area was built by the Rader brothers in 1876. That is now the Frijole Ranch we bypassed.



In 1921 Wallace Pratt was exploring the region for oil and fell in love with the canyon. Shortly afterwards he started buying up land and in 1930 built this cabin.

As Morgan commented, who would think you could find a cabin out in this wilderness with two bedrooms and two bathrooms, a great beamed ceiling and a fantastic fireplace.

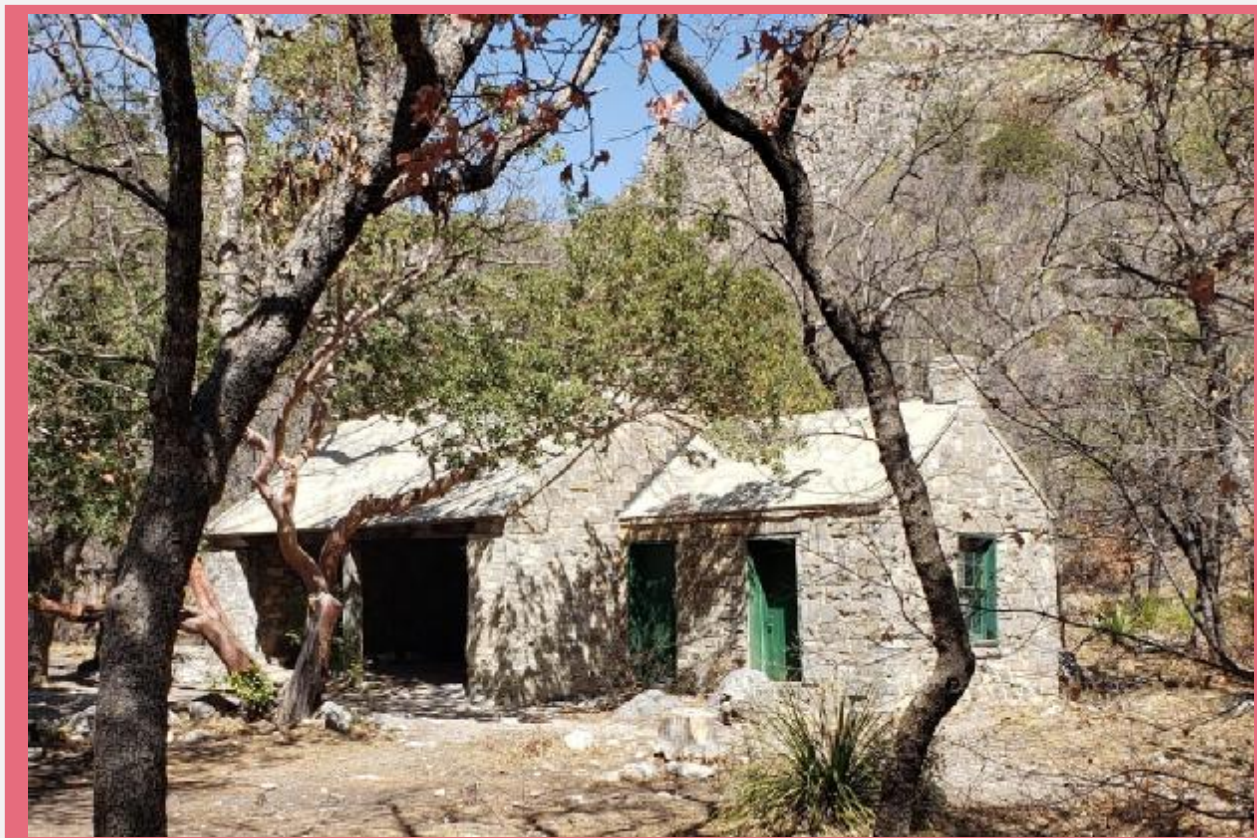
The Pratt's owned and used this cabin until 1957 when they donated 5,632 acres to the National Park Service.





As somewhat of an aficionado of roofing, you can imagine my surprise at seeing the surface of this roof. I have been on slate roofs before, but never have I seen one like this. I heard the Ranger say it leaks, but if you were to put down a waterproof base of some sort, I would think this could be a very practical roof.

The two stall garage below uses the same method of construction and materials. I guess that's why this place is in such good condition over 90 years after being built. As you will see below, Pratt also picked the best views of the valley for his building site.



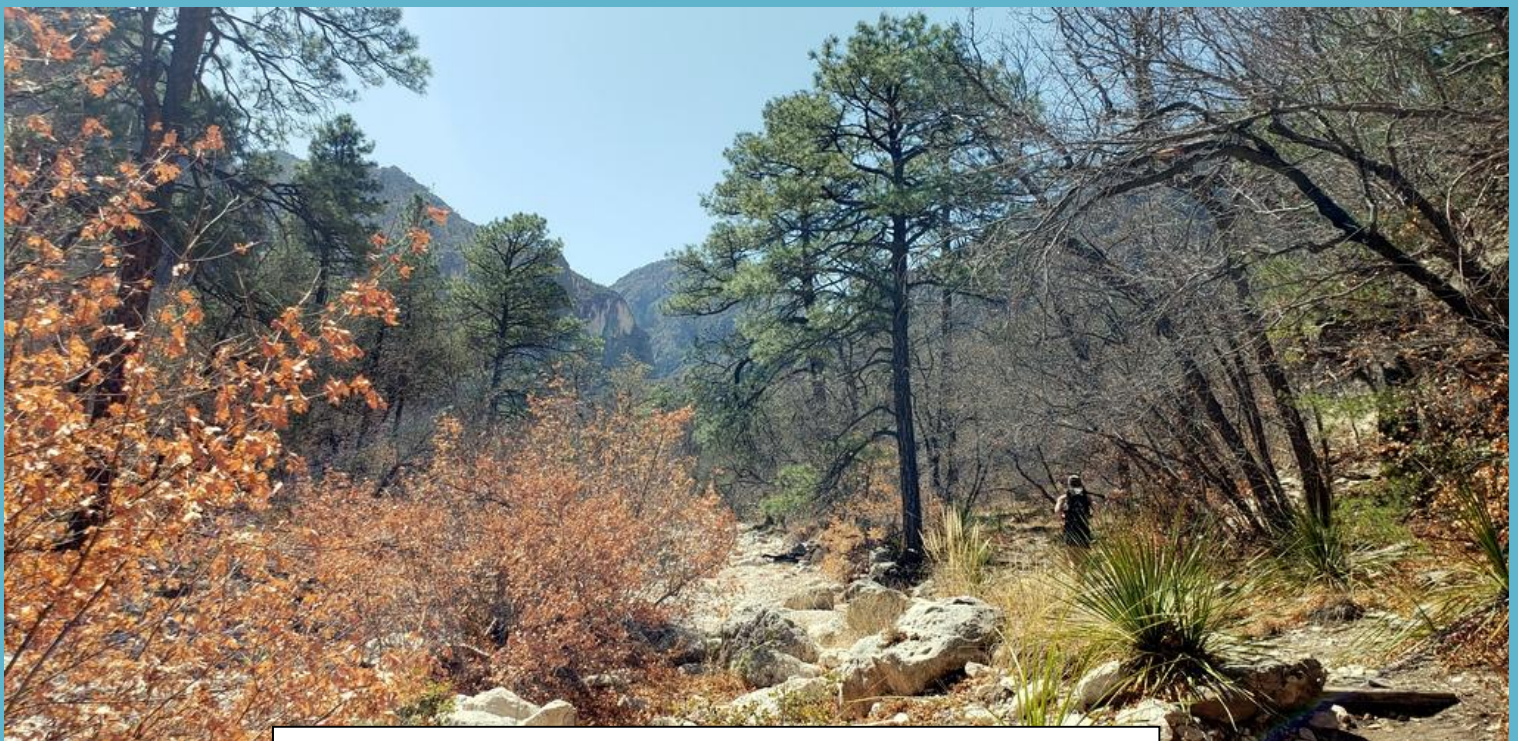


Relaxing on the front porch and enjoying the view below of McKittrick Canyon





After a nice rest we continued on our way up the canyon.



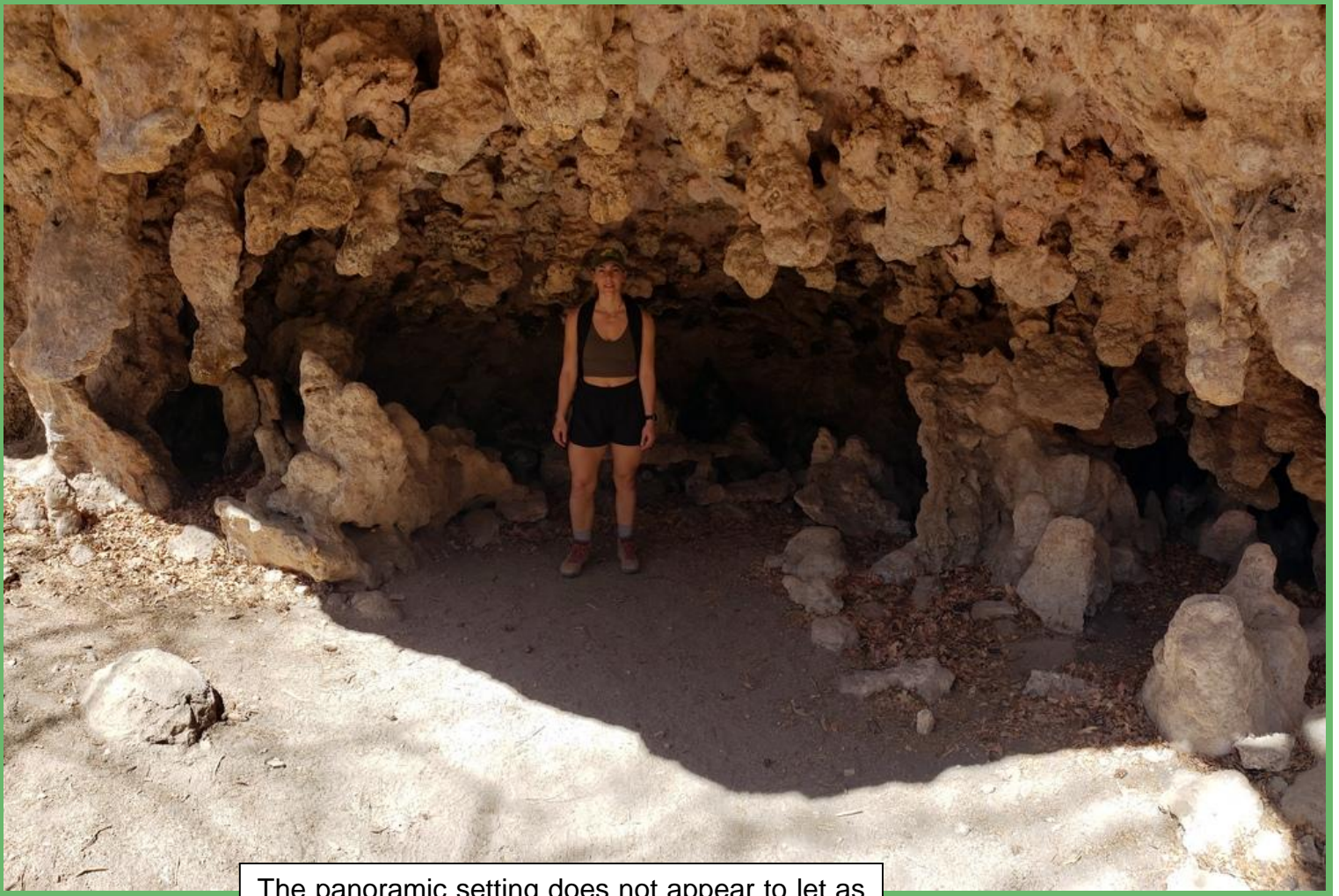
The best time to make this hike is supposed to be the fall, when the leaves are changing and the colors are abundant. Fortunately for us, the dead leaves on the trees are kind of orangey and add a nice bit of color. After the cabin it was a very beautiful hike. Similar to the Peak, we crossed into a more temperate zone. Trees, bushes and plants of all sorts became more abundant, more green, and much larger. I told Morgan it reminded me of our hikes in the Smokey Mountains of North Carolina and Virginia.



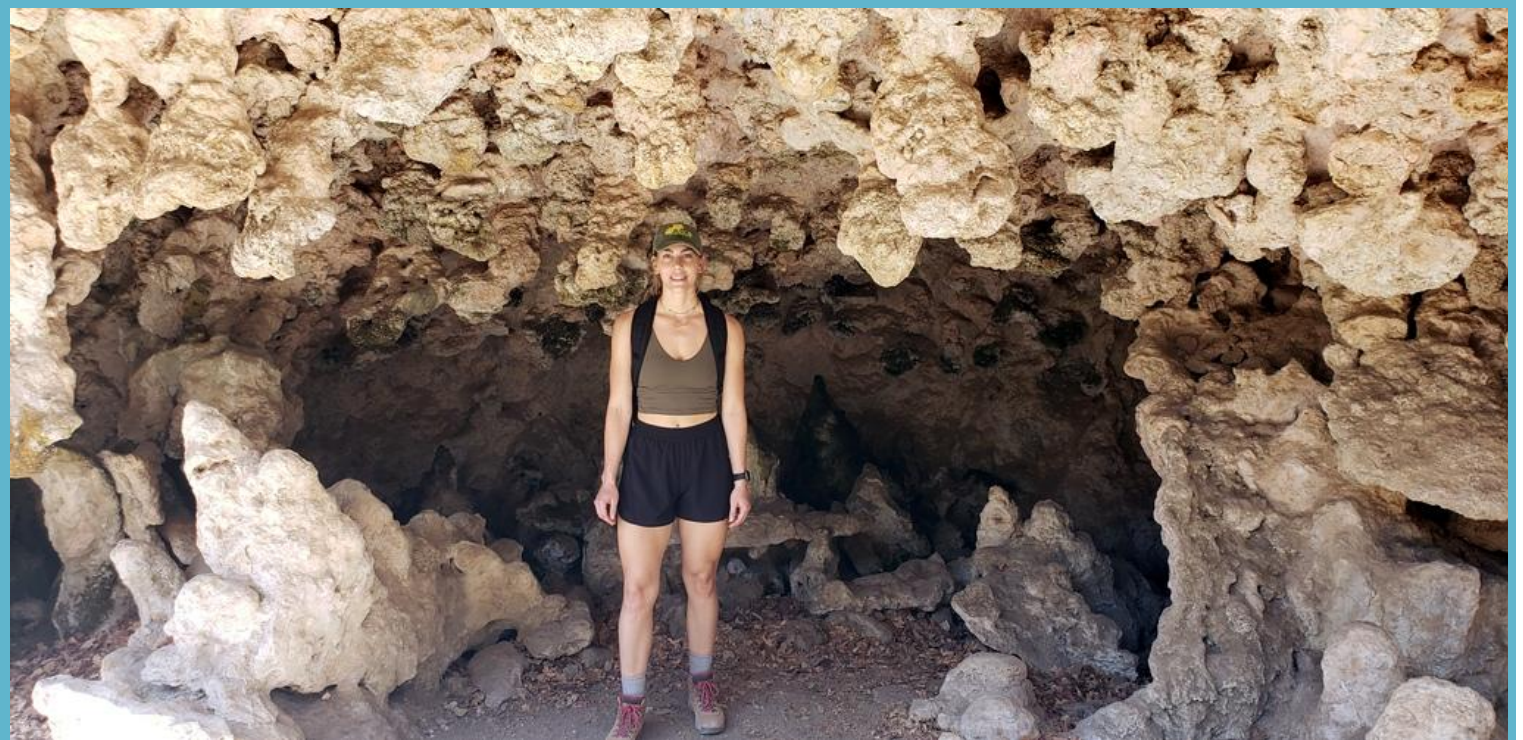
I wonder how long ago a seed blew into this rock crevice, found a minimal amount of spoil for a foothold, and began to grow.

Below is the Grotto. I have no idea how it was formed and could find no info in that regard on the web. But it is surely a weird formation out here.





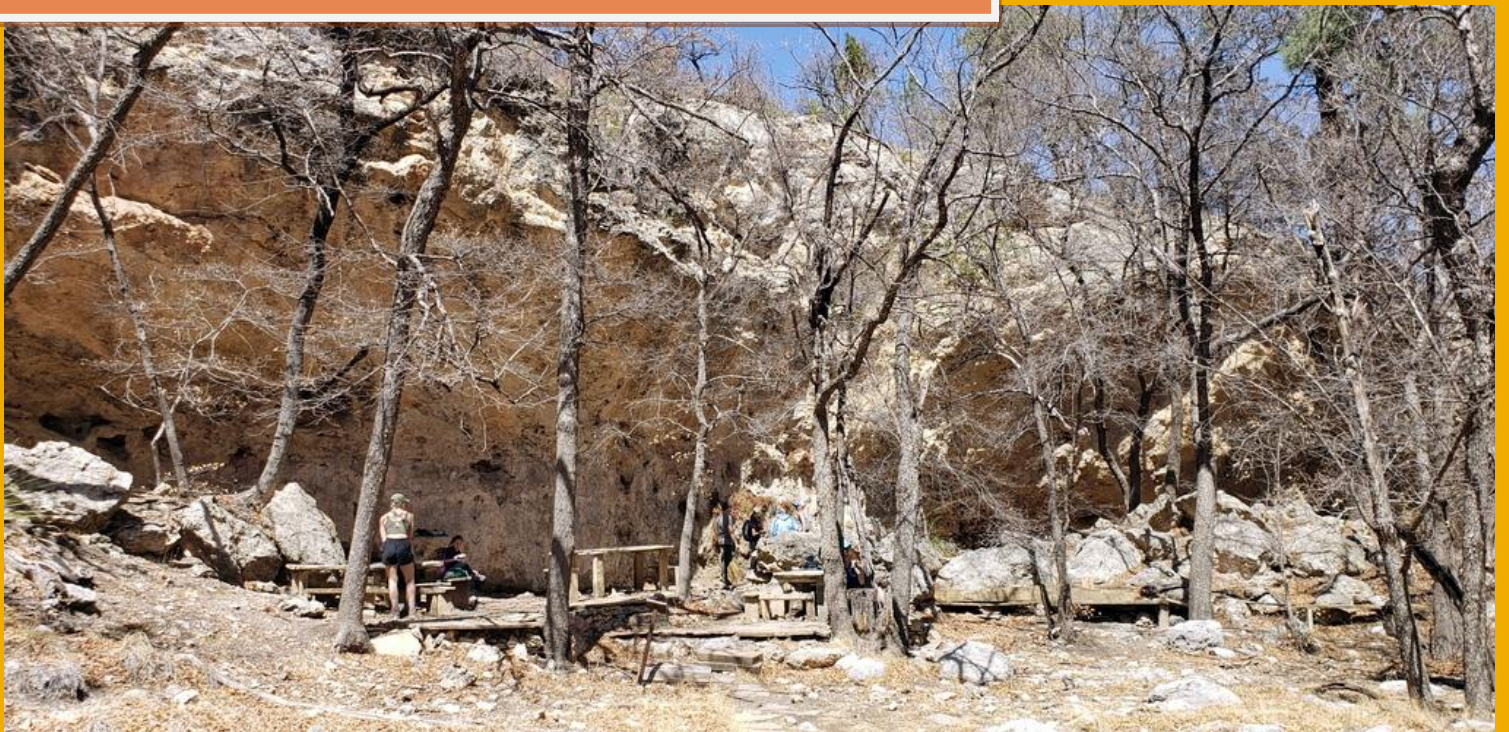
The panoramic setting does not appear to let as much light into the frame as a normal photo, so I'm glad I took the one below also.





Lunchtime! You can see the slate tables and benches in the background, and we are also sitting at one. And no, that's not my boxer's hanging out of my pants leg, that's a napkin tucked in so it won't blow away.

Below is the overall picnic area of the Grotto.



The hike back was uneventful as we are looking down the canyon instead of up at the mountains. It was about seven miles round trip, making about seventeen miles hiked in two days and twenty-four miles during our four day trip. "A good stretch of the legs" as Maureen O'Hara said to John Wayne in *The Quiet Man*.

We planned our route back to Houston, but decided to take a short seven mile detour to get a look at another airplane navigation arrow that also has a generator shed and beacon intact.

This is the Guadalupe/Cow Mountain/Delaware Springs navigation arrow. It's supposedly at an active airport, so I can't put the drone in the air for a better picture. I say supposedly because what they are passing off as an airstrip looks like it hasn't been used for a long time. I believe the beacon was placed on top of the pole to the right. Below is the generator shed. The next page shows the navigation markings on the roof of the shed.







We also found this 'variable speed drive' antique onsite. I was amazed the info plate is still legible. You can even see the model number. I looked it up and this model can still be purchased today for about \$2350. There are several on Ebay also.

From here we started the long drive to Houston. Somewhere about Iraan on I-10, we pulled into a rest area for the night.



Monday, March 22nd 2021 Day 64 The Last Day

We made stops for water, diesel, a free RV dump at another rest area, and lunch before hitting stop and go traffic between San Antonio and Katy due to construction. Arriving about 6:30 at Morgan & Matt's place, Matt had dinner on the grill. We ate, talked and watched *The Greatest Showman* which Matt had not seen before and Morgan and I enjoyed watching again.

That brings me to today, Monday. We finished off the pancake batter and sausages for breakfast, than I headed towards La Porte and the San Jacinto Battleground State park and Monument. I did not plan it this way, but it feels right to culminate this trip, after all of the museums and sites and battles for Texas Independence we have experienced, with the scene of the final battle.

But first, a quick visit to the Battleship *Texas*. A battleship from WWI



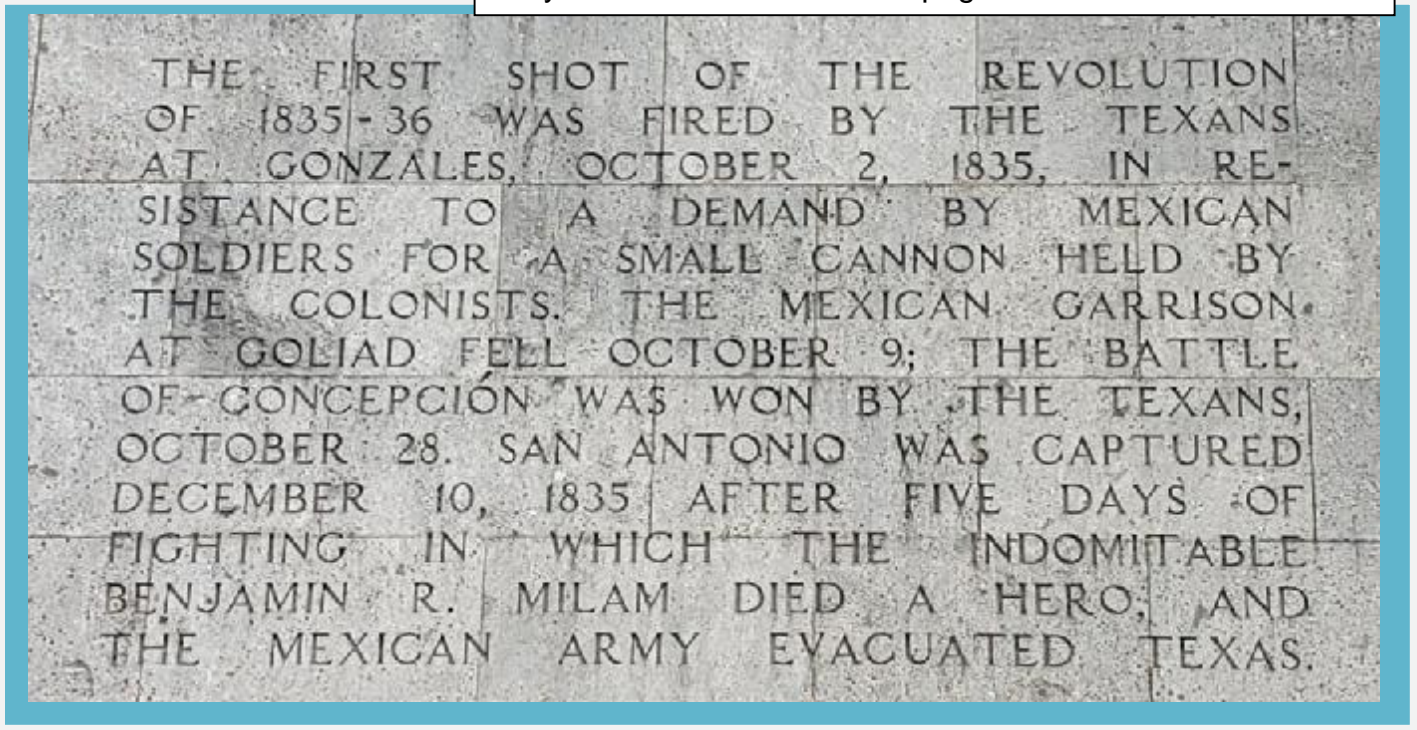
Oh well, what else would you expect on this trip. If it's not Covid it's the freeze. If it's not the freeze it's repairs.



Hmmm...looks like state funding may have been a little lax lately.



Okay, this was disappointing. I was looking forward to the museum and the elevator ride to the top of the monument and the view it affords of the surrounding area. When first brought up on the web it states open until 6 p.m. While here, I dug three pages deeper into the site to find it has been closed since the freeze due to water damage and lost documents. Why that can't be on the front page I will never know.



Above and the following are some of the carvings on the monument.

TEXAS DECLARED HER INDEPENDENCE AT WASHINGTON - ON - THE - BRAZOS MARCH 2, FOR NEARLY TWO MONTHS HER ARMIES MET DISASTER AND DEFEAT: DR. JAMES GRANT'S MEN WERE KILLED ON THE AGUA DULCE MARCH 2; WILLIAM BARRET TRAVIS AND HIS MEN SACRIFICED THEIR LIVES AT THE ALAMO, MARCH 6; WILLIAM WARD WAS DEFEATED AT REFUGIO, MARCH 14; AMON B. KING'S MEN WERE EXECUTED NEAR REFUGIO, MARCH 16; AND JAMES WALKER FANNIN AND HIS ARMY WERE PUT TO DEATH NEAR GOLIAD MARCH 27, 1836.

MEASURED BY ITS RESULTS, SAN JACINTO WAS ONE OF THE DECISIVE BATTLES OF THE WORLD. THE FREEDOM OF TEXAS FROM MEXICO WON HERE LED TO ANNEXATION AND TO THE MEXICAN WAR, RESULTING IN THE ACQUISITION BY THE UNITED STATES OF THE STATES OF TEXAS, NEW MEXICO, ARIZONA, NEVADA, CALIFORNIA, UTAH AND PARTS OF COLORADO, WYOMING, KANSAS AND OKLAHOMA ALMOST ONE - THIRD OF THE PRESENT AREA OF THE AMERICAN NATION, NEARLY A MILLION SQUARE MILES OF TERRITORY, CHANGED SOVEREIGNTY.



WITH THE BATTLE CRY, "REMEMBER THE ALAMO! REMEMBER GOLIAD!" THE TEXANS CHARGED. THE ENEMY, TAKEN BY SURPRISE, RALLIED FOR A FEW MINUTES, THEN FLED IN DISORDER. THE TEXANS HAD ASKED NO QUARTER AND GAVE NONE. THE SLAUGHTER WAS APPALLING, VICTORY COMPLETE, AND TEXAS FREE! ON THE FOLLOWING DAY GENERAL ANTONIO LÓPEZ DE SANTA ANNA, SELF-STYLED "NAPOLEON OF THE WEST," RECEIVED FROM A GENEROUS FOE THE MERCY HE HAD DENIED TRAVIS AT THE ALAMO AND FANNIN AT GOLIAD.

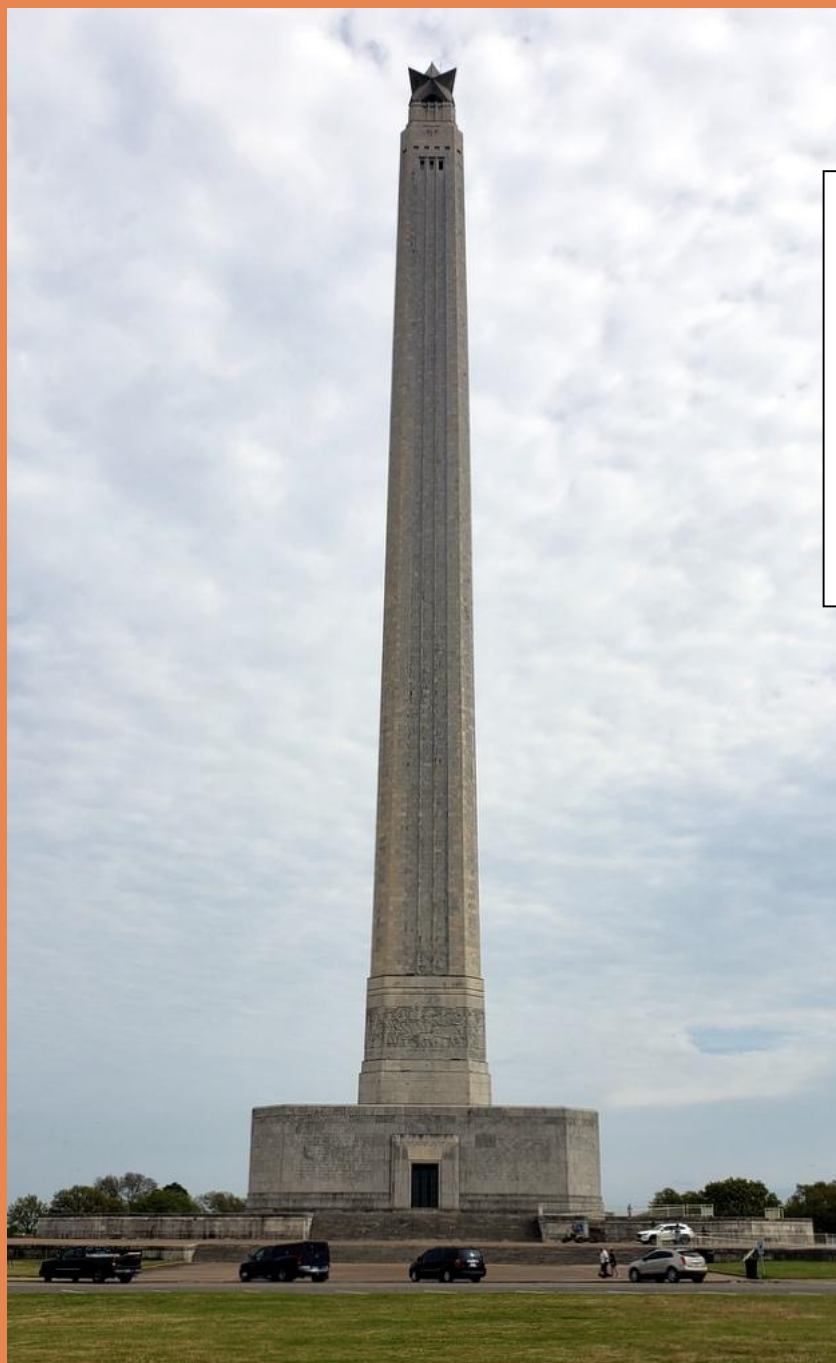
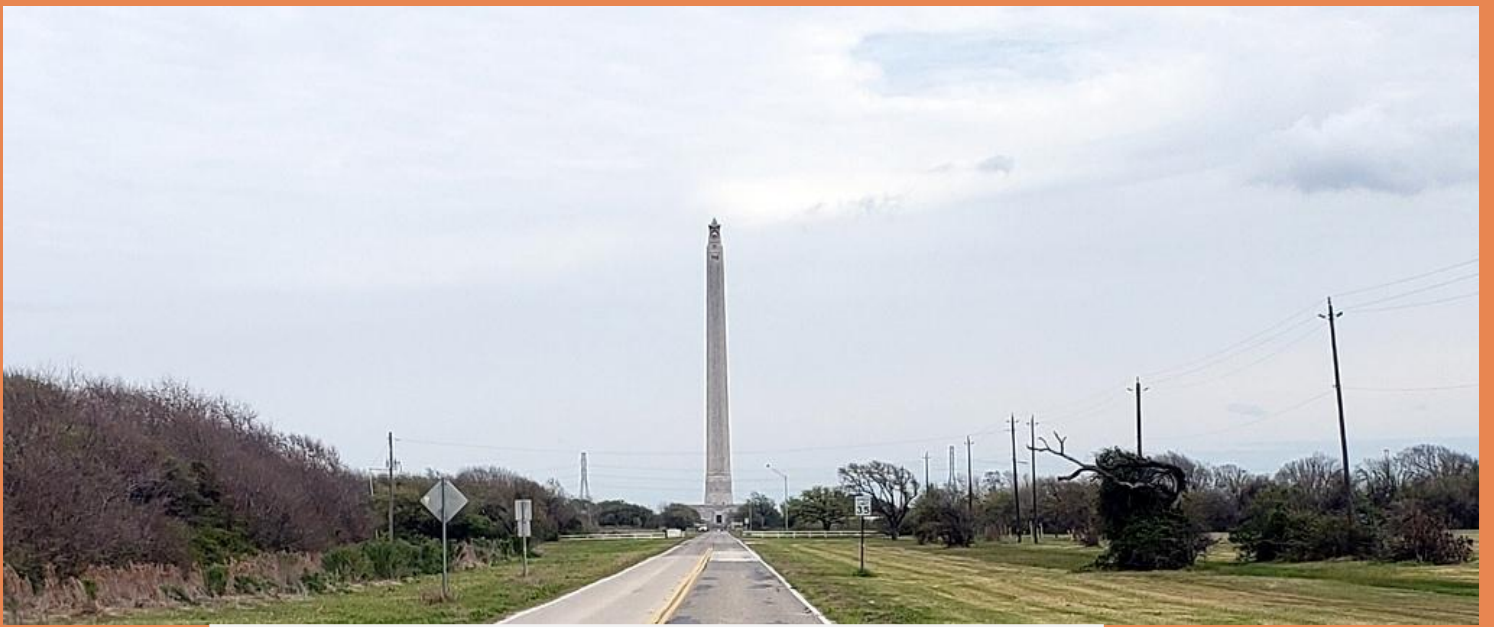




BATTLE TIMELINE

- 1** Texan Army makes camp near a strategic intersection in early morning of April 20, 1836, the day before the battle.
- 2** Mexican Army arrives a few hours later and makes camp across the plain from the Texans.
- 3** Cavalry skirmish on afternoon of April 20, 1836. Both sides retreat back to camp.
- 4** Texans begin their charge on the Mexicans on the afternoon of April 21, 1836.
- 5** Battle begins here when Sherman's infantry advances around the Mexican breastworks and opens fire on Gen. Cós's reinforcements.
- 6** After an 18-minute fight, Mexican forces are quickly overwhelmed.
- 7** Texans continue to kill over 600 retreating Mexican soldiers, while only nine Texans died.

Without any brochure or info where things happened and what the granite monuments staged around the battlefield signify, we will have to make do with this diagram and timeline, which is actually very good.



I had to do this research on the web.

The monument is 567.31 feet tall and is topped with a 34 foot, 220-ton Lone Star. It was constructed between 1936 and 1939 and is the world's tallest masonry column. I was hoping to get to the observation deck.

And so it goes.

This brings me to the end of another adventure. I will be helping Morgan & Matt pack the moving truck, playing golf and watching basketball and baseball during the next week before arriving back home April 1st.

I hope everyone enjoyed traveling the highways and byways of Texas, learning about Texas independence, the War with Mexico, sea turtles and especially the scenery of the mountains of West Texas.

It has been frustrating at times due to Covid and the big freeze, but I sure am glad I saved the best for last with Guadalupe Mountains and Carlsbad Caverns. It was worth it. I hope everyone enjoyed my Rocky impersonation at the Peak. A funny story to go along with that. We had to ask a couple to take the picture of Morgan dragging me to the top, then they watched as I did the Rocky video. Afterward they asked Morgan to take their picture, saying "we're not as creative as that". That made me feel good that I can offer everyone something they may not get to see anywhere else.

It's always a sad goodbye at this point, but I look forward to seeing most of you on the golf course back home in just a week or two.

Next year? Only time will tell.

Until next time.....