



**Big Bend, Carlsbad and Guadalupe National Parks Trip Notes  
Including Carlsbad Caverns and Guadalupe National Parks  
February 26 – March 8, 2011**

I was very pleased to have completed a marathon on the sands of Surfside Beach Texas on Saturday and then head off to this hike – and survive. I felt pretty okay after the marathon but slowness will do that for you. My drive from south of Houston to the Bush International Airport went well until the winds started. Look what I found upon arrival in Midland Texas:

*Severe Weather Alert for Midland, TX - BLOWING DUST ADVISORY IN EFFECT UNTIL 9 PM CST THIS EVENING. .HIGH WIND WARNING REMAINS IN EFFECT UNTIL 9 PM CST THIS EVENING. THE NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE IN MIDLAND/ODESSA HAS ISSUED A BLOWING DUST ADVISORY...WHICH IS IN EFFECT UNTIL 9 PM CST THIS EVENING. A HIGH WIND WARNING REMAINS IN EFFECT UNTIL 9 PM CST THIS EVENING. \* WINDS: WESTERLY WINDS OF 35 TO 45 MPH...WITH GUSTS TO 60 TO 65 MPH WILL BE LIKELY THIS AFTERNOON AND EVENING ACROSS MUCH OF THE AREA. WESTERLY WINDS SUSTAINED AT 55 TO 70 MPH...WITH GUSTS NEAR 100 MPH WILL BE POSSIBLE IN THE GUADALUPE MOUNTAINS. \* IMPACTS: HIGH WINDS TODAY WILL HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO PRODUCE DAMAGE TO ROOFS...FENCES...AND WEAK STRUCTURES. LOOSE OBJECTS MAY BECOME AIRBORNE. HAZARDOUS DRIVING CONDITIONS CAN BE EXPECTED IN HIGH PROFILE VEHICLES...ESPECIALLY IN THE GUADALUPE AND DAVIS MOUNTAINS...AS WELL AS ROADS RUNNING NORTH AND SOUTH. BLOWING DUST COULD RESTRICT VISIBILITY LOCALLY TO LESS THAN ONE MILE. PRECAUTIONARY/PREPAREDNESS ACTIONS... A HIGH WIND WARNING MEANS A HAZARDOUS HIGH WIND EVENT IS EXPECTED OR OCCURRING. SUSTAINED WIND SPEEDS OF AT LEAST 40 MPH OR GUSTS OF 58 MPH OR MORE CAN LEAD TO PROPERTY DAMAGE. A BLOWING DUST ADVISORY MEANS THAT BLOWING DUST WILL RESTRICT VISIBILITIES TO ONE MILE OR LESS. TRAVELERS ARE URGED TO USE CAUTION. PEOPLE WITH RESPIRATORY PROBLEMS SHOULD REMAIN INDOORS UNTIL THE BLOWING DUST SUBSIDES.*

It would be the next morning for the start of the hiking tour so I was on my own in Midland. I readily gave up walking to a nice dinner when the wind picked me up off my feet and blew me against a building. I found sufficient food at the local grocery store.

There are two National Parks in Texas: Big Bend National Park and Guadalupe Mountains National Park and I would see them both. Big Bend got its name from the huge bend in the Rio Grande River. The Rio Grande River runs through this park which is located in the Southwestern corner of Texas. Big Bend is 80 percent desert but three sides of it are surrounded by mountains. There are two rivers running through it. Note that the mountains seen in Big Bend are not even in the park but are in Mexico and western Texas.

From National Geographic – photo and text:

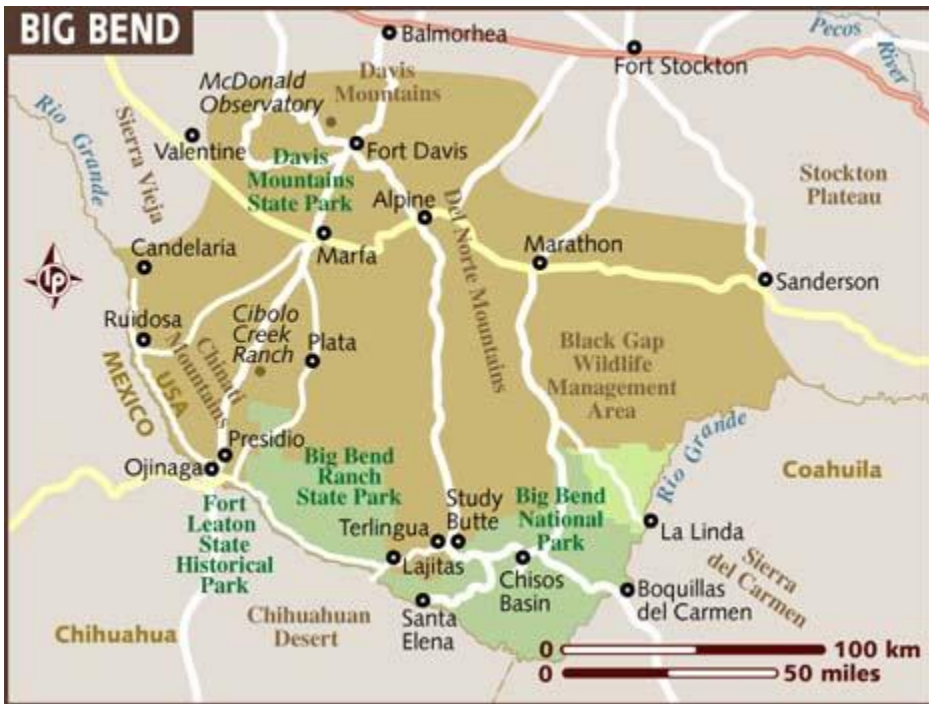
*"Gunmetal sheen of sundown bathes craggy terrain where the Rio Grande cuts a tortuous path. The 801,000-acre Big Bend National Park on the U.S. side, at right, is now complemented by Mexico's Santa Elena Canyon Protected Area, created in November 1994."*



Cattail Falls as an example of unique and different terrain.



This is Chisos Basin as seen from atop Casa Grande. We were pretty near and could look down on this national park lodge and village where we stayed and which was the only game in town. Here is a map of the area to orient you. El Paso isn't all that far away. The park sits on the edge of Mexico and we would be looking into Mexico plenty of times during our hikes and canoe trip. See Marathon, Texas? More on Marathon Texas later.



*An early view of Big Bend National Park, though taken from the internet.*

### **Monday, Feb 28 – Day 1**

We start early morning from the Hampton Inn in Midland/Odessa, Texas. Why Daddy Bush loved Midland I didn't figure out unless it was just that there are so many oil wells. Yet I suspect (having learned more about him in last month's visit to the Senior Bush Presidential Library) that it would take

much more for him. Midland/Odessa is flat and brown and seemingly just full of shrub and tumbleweeds. Both days we were there were extremely windy so I didn't have the best of views.

Timberline Tours had given us this sales pitch. I'd had many other folks tell me that I needed to see Big Bend too: From [www.Timbertours.com](http://www.Timbertours.com) - *Nestled in the southwest corner of Texas, not close enough to any major city to provide any meaningful clue as to its location, Big Bend requires a little scrutiny to understand its remote and wild character. The park is situated along a 107-mile stretch of the Rio Grande, including that point where the river turns sharply to the north (hence, its name, "Big Bend"). This section of the Rio Grande is protected as a Wild and Scenic River and the spectacular limestone gorges through which the river flows are among the astonishing, varied natural features contained within the park's boundaries. The vast Chihuahan Desert, extending northward from Mexico, dominates a considerable expanse of the park, but standing in stark contrast to the desert lowlands are the rugged, forested Chisos Mountains, whose peaks reach an elevation of 8,000'. Without a doubt, Big Bend offers some of the wildest and unspoiled land remaining in the "lower 48".*

*We've planned our Big Bend program for early spring—the absolute best time to visit this park. With an estimated 1,100 plant species, 430 species of birds and a wide range of other wildlife, including gray fox, pronghorn antelope and mule deer, spring is an exciting season in this desert environment.*

*We've structured this program in a manner that will provide the varied experiences that are the essence of Big Bend. We'll hike the high country of the Chisos, explore the erosional landscapes of the Window, the Chihuahan Desert environment and the breathtaking gorges carved by the Rio Grande. A full-day's raft journey on the Rio Grande in spectacular Santa Elena Canyon is another dramatic feature of this program.*

### **Into Marathon Texas**

The drive was long – maybe three to four hours – having gone through and stopped at both Fort Stockton and Marathon. Marathon held some extra interest beyond its name as it is home to a lovely looking old historical Inn called The Gage Hotel.



History from their website at [www.gagehotel.com](http://www.gagehotel.com):

*Alfred Gage came to Texas from Vermont in 1878, his enthusiasm for Texas fueled by a vast land that offered the opportunity to make his fortune as a rancher, banker and businessman. In 1927, Gage commissioned El Paso architects Trost and Trost to design The Gage as a hotel and ranch headquarters for his 500,000-acre ranch. Sadly, Gage died in 1928, only one year after construction was completed. In 1978, J.P. Bryan and his wife, Mary Jon, bought the building and returned The Gage Hotel to its turn-of-the-century trans-Pecos glory, melding the region's rich ranching heritage of Mexican, Spanish and Native American cultures.*



Yes, there's a real road sign that says "26 miles to Marathon."

### **Into Big Bend and the Lodge**

By mid-afternoon we were at the Chisos Mountain Lodge, our home for the next five nights. The rooms were pretty much what you expect of a parks facility but plenty comfortable and with a balcony overlooking the basin and looking up to the spectacularly stark and beautiful mountains.



We arrived early enough to hike leisurely along the Windows Trail to the spectacular Window, a pour-off that offers a magnificent view of the desert lowlands (4 miles). We kept our eyes focused on new plants and on a lookout for animals but much of what we expected rarely materialized over our six

days. Between a very hot and dry spell, and a cold like they hadn't seen in many years, both were limited.



Despite the continual warnings of mountain lions and bears being in the area most just wanted to see one. Only a few saw the backside of a mountain lion. The trail to the Windows View had been carved by the old Civilian Conservation Corps. It was a dramatic view and fell off into never-neverland.

### **Flora and fauna** – from [www.Wikipedia.com](http://www.Wikipedia.com)

*Despite its harsh environment, Big Bend has an amazing variety and number of plant and animal species. It has more than 1200 species of plants (including 60 different cacti species), more than 600 animal species, and about 3600 insect species. The diversity of life is largely due to the diverse ecology and changes in elevation, ranging from the dry, hot desert to the cool mountains to the fertile river valley.*

*Most of the animals are not visible in the day, particularly in the desert. The park comes alive at night, with many of the animals foraging for food. About 150 Cougar sightings are reported per year, despite the fact that there are only a total of two dozen Cougars. Other species that inhabit the park include Black-tailed Jackrabbit, kangaroo rats, Greater Roadrunner, Golden Eagle, Collared Peccary, and Coyote. Mexican Black Bears are also present in the mountain areas.*



Some of the rare animal life we saw: The birds are my own picture but the mountain lion is in the visitor's center. The blue eyed dog was shy but not with Big John. They shared kisses over and over again. I did get some pictures of their rare white tailed deer found only in Big Bend as they plus roadrunners plus javelina (a pig like animal) and skunk were in abundance at the lodge area.

*The variety of cactus and other plant life add color to the Big Bend region. Cactus species in the park include prickly pear), Claret Cup and Pitaya. In the spring, the wildflowers are in full bloom and the yucca flowers display bright colors. Bluebonnets are prevalent in Big Bend, and white and pink bluebonnets are sometimes visible by the road. Other flowering plants such as the Desert Marigold, Desert Willow, Ocotillo, Rock Nettle and Lechuguilla abound in Big Bend.*

*The first U.S. record of the Northern Tufted Flycatcher, a Central American species, was from this site in November 1991. Birders also flock to the park as it is home to the only area in the United States within the breeding range of the Colima Warbler.*

For us to see most of these it would have taken pictures from a tourist book. It had been far too dry on top of some major cold spells and we wondered if animals had survived. Certainly the flowering cacti didn't appear to even be in bud let alone in bloom.

## Tuesday, March 1 – Day 2

Always starting breakfast at 7am and departing early thereafter, we hiked from the lodge into the Chisos as we headed for the South Rim on what generally is recognized as the quintessential hike in Texas. The views along the trail of much of the Big Bend country extending into Mexico are unsurpassed (13 – 14 miles depending on whose GPS you checked.)



This was the toughest hike of the week and despite that young John took the opportunity to climb any additional cliff he could find. From atop we could look down on the valley with our lodging and this odd shaped pyramid of rock. The trail was both good at times and technical at other times and I was glad to have my trekking poles. But remember I was just coming off Surfside Beach marathon too.



From atop we could look over into a huge expanse that was said to be Mexico. And just when we were feeling like supermen –women along came these four young cute kids who were backpacking for days. Don't they look fresh?





The ponies were in training and some of our hikers had been entertained by this friendly pony which had gotten loose in camp down by the lodge. I suppose that the trail was open to non-hikers via a pony ride.

### **Wednesday, March 2 – Day 3**

We headed south from the Chisos Basin along the Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive to the Mule Ears Trailhead. Our hike to the base of Mule Ears Peaks would normally showcase the incredible beauty of the Chihuahuan Desert at a time when the Chihuahuan should be in full spring bloom but alas it was not to be. The variety of cacti, yucca, ocotillo and other desert plants along the trail is said to be truly amazing (7 miles). Again, it was the dryness and maybe coupled with the extreme earlier freeze that meant there were no blooms at all. It was nearly as empty of wildlife though we did see the Javelinas, a number of birds, and one hiker saw the backside of a mountain lion.

After a stop at an old historical small town and its general store, we drove to the end of the Ross Maxwell Road and to hike along the Rio Grande into the mouth of Santa Elena Canyon (2 miles). This reminded me of Zion's The Narrows but was of the filthy looking Rio Grande River. One has to see it, filthy or not. The canyons were amazing.



The Mule Ears from the trail. Diana in the pink – cacti that is. Example of the dry desert floor.

In the canyon (maybe it would remind you of the Narrows in Zion National Park) no one would have been in the slightest bit tempted to get wet. This is a nasty river maybe made worse by the drought. Instead of traversing down the canyon via water like in Zion, we climbed steep switchbacks to get up and over and then down to the river's edge.



### **Thursday, March 3 – Day 4**

This was to be a relatively moderate hike to Lost Mine and our final trek in the Chisos highlands (7 miles) but I'm not so sure I agree about the "moderation" aspect. Maybe it was the steepness. Maybe it was the heat, but I felt it was plenty strenuous hike. It can't be age. The trail reminded me of the Clouds Rest hike in Yosemite because of the narrow ledge at the end looking off into never-never-land with steep drop offs and great views.

At the end of the hike someone must have bothered a wasp's nest because they were swarming and I managed to get stung. It was my first experience and it created a rather large area of extreme stinging and then a few days later the oddest itchy sensation remained in the area. I've been told the itchy sensation is not unusual.



Dramatic views. Sculptured trees. Resting on a rock. This was the trail to the Lost Mine followed by the Cliffside with drop-offs on both side to get to the top. The views were worth the trek.



And if momma and baby could make it, so could we. We just hoped the little one had on lots of sunscreen because even with lathering on the sunscreen most of us got burned anyway. Then off we were in the late afternoon to the Ghost Town of Terlingua.



You know Terlingua by the famous chili festival held each year at this famous old mining camp. It was even featured in a National Geographic. From [www.Wikipedia.com](http://www.Wikipedia.com) –  
*Terlingua (Ghost Town) is a mining district in southwestern Brewster County, Texas. It is located near the Rio Grande and the Texas villages of Lajitas and Study Butte as well as the Mexican village of Santa Elena. The discovery of cinnabar from which the metal mercury is extracted in the mid-1880s brought miners to the area, creating a city of 2,000 people. The only remnants of the mining days are a ghost town of the Howard Perry-owned Chisos Mining Company and several nearby capped and abandoned mines, most notably the California Hill, the Rainbow, the 248 and the Study Butte mines. The mineral terlinguite was first found in the vicinity of California Hill.*

*According to the historian Kenneth Baxter Ragsdale, "Facts concerning the discovery of cinnabar in the Terlingua area are so shrouded in legend and fabrication that it is impossible to cite the date and location of the first quicksilver recovery." The cinnabar was apparently known to Native Americans, who prized its brilliant red color for body pigment. Various Mexican and American prospectors reportedly found cinnabar at Terlingua in the 1880s, but the remoteness and hostile Indians deterred mining.*

*A man named Jack Dawson reportedly produced the first mercury from Terlingua in 1888, but the district got off to a slow start. It was not until the mid-1890s that the Terlingua finds began to be publicized in newspapers and mining industry magazines. By 1900, there were four mining companies operating at Terlingua.*

*Desert Sports sponsors the annual Mas o Menos 100 mountain bike race during Presidents Day weekend each February. The race started as the Chihuahuan Desert Challenge that was first held in the mid 1980's on the Rio Grande. The event lasts 4 days. Although offering a serious challenge for experienced riders, there are events for riders of all skill levels, both competitive and non-competitive. With changing land ownership and sponsorship the Desert Challenge evolved into the Mas o Menos 100 which culminates in the feature event: a 100 km mountain bike race through very rough country.*

*On the first Saturday of November, over 10,000 "chiliheads" convene in Terlingua for two annual chili cookoffs: the Chili Appreciation Society International and the Frank X. Tolbert / Wick Fowler World Chili Championships. In the late 1970s the Chili Cook-Off sponsored a "Mexican Fence-Climbing Contest" to spoof the U.S. Government's planned reinforcement of the chain-link fence separating El Paso, Tex. from Cd. Juárez, Mexico and San Ysidro, Calif. from Tijuana, Mexico. The fence the "chili heads" used was constructed by undocumented Mexican workers who labored annually for the Cook-Off organizers at five dollars a day plus meals and rustic lodging. Among the founders of the first chili cook-off in 1967 was car manufacturer Carroll Shelby, who owned a 220,000-acre ranch nearby.*



Imagine my surprise to come home and the next day there was a full three page spread in the New York Times about a New Yorker who moved to Terlingua. I'd just said – why would anybody live there!



Sitting on the porch with the best of them. I never saw the transplant from New York but did talk to a fellow at the bar who said he'd lived there for 67 years. He looked ALL of it.



Terlingua is home of the equally noted Starlight Theater where we dined and were entertained with familiar songs on the guitar by a guy who turned out to be a local music teacher. From [www.thestarlighttheater.com](http://www.thestarlighttheater.com) – *This has recently reopened under new ownership. It is highlighted in most tour books as a 'must see' and I'd sort of agree. The food was fine too, as were the unusual and noted margaritas.*



### **Fri, Mar 4 – Day 5**

This was The Water Day – and my hesitation day – but it turned out fine thanks to a very kind young fellow who took control of “our” canoe. I was worried about who would be ‘stuck’ with me as I’d not ever been in a canoe and I not only don’t swim, I’ve never even floated.

We joined Big Bend River Tours [www.bigbendrivers.com](http://www.bigbendrivers.com) that seems to be owned by a couple good looking and very fit sports-minded ex-hippies who were colorful in their own right even if we didn’t have the river and views and hot springs village. .

Tours for a full-day of canoeing (low water levels made rafting impossible). This adventure on the Rio Grande reminded us that the park is named Big Bend for the river’s major bend, as we were on a few miles of it as it twisted through the Santa Elena Gorge. The sheer limestone walls that line the gorge soar 1,500 feet above the river. Oddly, Mexico was on one side and the U.S. on the other making us

wonder more than once how a wall could ever separate the two countries, and especially such a river that's not only narrow in some places but only a couple feet deep.

Our canoe trip included a picnic at Hot Springs Village. This village was along a layered, crumbling cliff face with Indian petro glyphs and pictographs at the edge of old crumbled buildings that used to be a general store, several living quarters and an old motel. The centerpiece was a circle of huge palm trees, planted to provide shelter from the sun with the temperature beneath much lower and much needed. That was the location of our picnic brought in by canoe.



One of the owners, a tough hippie gal, inviting us to the muddy waters. Half way through the water trip we would land in Hot Springs for a soak in the springs and a walk through the cliffs that were full of swallows and their mud nests. Here's Dick and Carol, owners of Timberline Adventures, in the hot springs. I wonder if the springs were at was the cause of my rash the next day.



Young John would kindly agree to be my partner in the canoe knowing full well that I'd never been in a canoe and that I threatened a stroke or heart attack if I ended up in the water. Here are the owners of the canoe company fixing us lunch with Carol looking on.



### **Saturday, March 5 – Day 6**

Our last day in Big Bend included a short couple-hour hike through the narrowing canyon atop Burro Mesa to the spectacular pour-off at the mesa's southern edge (4 miles). I got down one of the ledges but about didn't get back up were it not for the help of a couple kind young fellows.

Thank heavens the winds that picked up and about blew us off our feet during part of this hike through the canyon didn't happen during the canoe trip.





That last picture is Carol who was just like spider-woman and made it straight up whilst some of us had to get talked through it and assisted. Why did I pack my backpack heavy with 100-ounces of water and insist on carrying it? It was because I wanted to brag to my trainer that I was getting cross-training all week!

### ***Goodbye to those who weren't taking the New Mexico extender***

Lunch would be at a Mexican restaurant in Fort Stockton before separating off with about half the hikers would return to Midland for the end of their hike, while we continued onto Carlsbad, New Mexico for a couple days more.



Group 1 returned to Midland after the 6-day hike. Group 2 continued onto Carlsbad for the Caverns and Guadalupe.

## **Onto Carlsbad**

Our hotel in Carlsbad NM would be a newly renovated Best Western. Our guides, owners Carol and Dick, treated us to dinner at the old historical bank building that had been recycled into a high end hotel and restaurant called the Trinity Hotel. This would have been a night on our own as it was between trips. Here's a view from our balcony down to the old time bar.

Were I staying in the area on my own, I would have considered staying at the Trinity Hotel in one of their suites.

From [www.thetrinityhotel.com](http://www.thetrinityhotel.com) –

*Built 1892 as the First National Bank, this historic property once served as home to the first newspaper and headquarters of the Carlsbad Irrigation District. Today the old bank building is home to luxurious over-sized suites appointed with the finest amenities to meet your every need. It also now boasts a fine dining restaurant, wine gift shop, and coffee.*

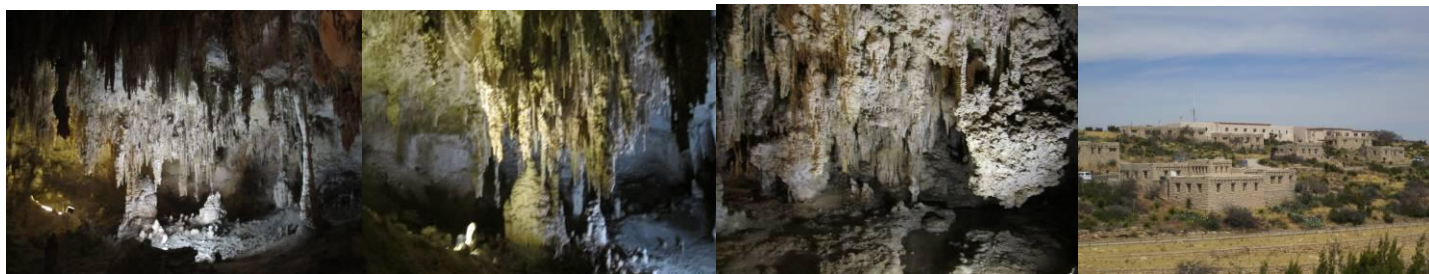


## **Sunday, March 6 – Extender Day 1**

The sales pitch from [www.timbertours.com](http://www.timbertours.com) - *The opportunity to bag another of our national parks is irresistible. We'll visit the labyrinth of Carlsbad Caverns National Park, overnight in Carlsbad, and then head down the road to Guadalupe National Park.*

*One of the largest and most astounding cave systems in the world, Carlsbad Caverns National Park is actually comprised of a network of over 100 known caves within the porous limestone bowels of the Guadalupe Mountains of southeastern New Mexico. The park is situated about 170 miles northwest of the Midland/Odessa area, or about a 3-hour drive from the assembly location for our Big Bend Hike. The point being—how can we resist a visit to Carlsbad since we're in the neighborhood anyway?*

Since we had the full day in Carlsbad, that gave us the full day in the Caverns, starting with a ranger led tour through the King's Palace, lunch at the visitor's center, followed by time on our own to exploring the spectacular Big Room, with its incredibly dramatic formations. The afternoon meant entering the caverns via the Natural Entrance Route, which simulates the basic route utilized by early explorers. My last and only trip there (in 1970 when we lived in Las Cruces) would have been from the natural entrance route too, where one sees the bats fly out at dusk. It's about 750 feet down on a switch-backing trail illuminated, fortunately, by the park service but supplemented by my own flashlight.



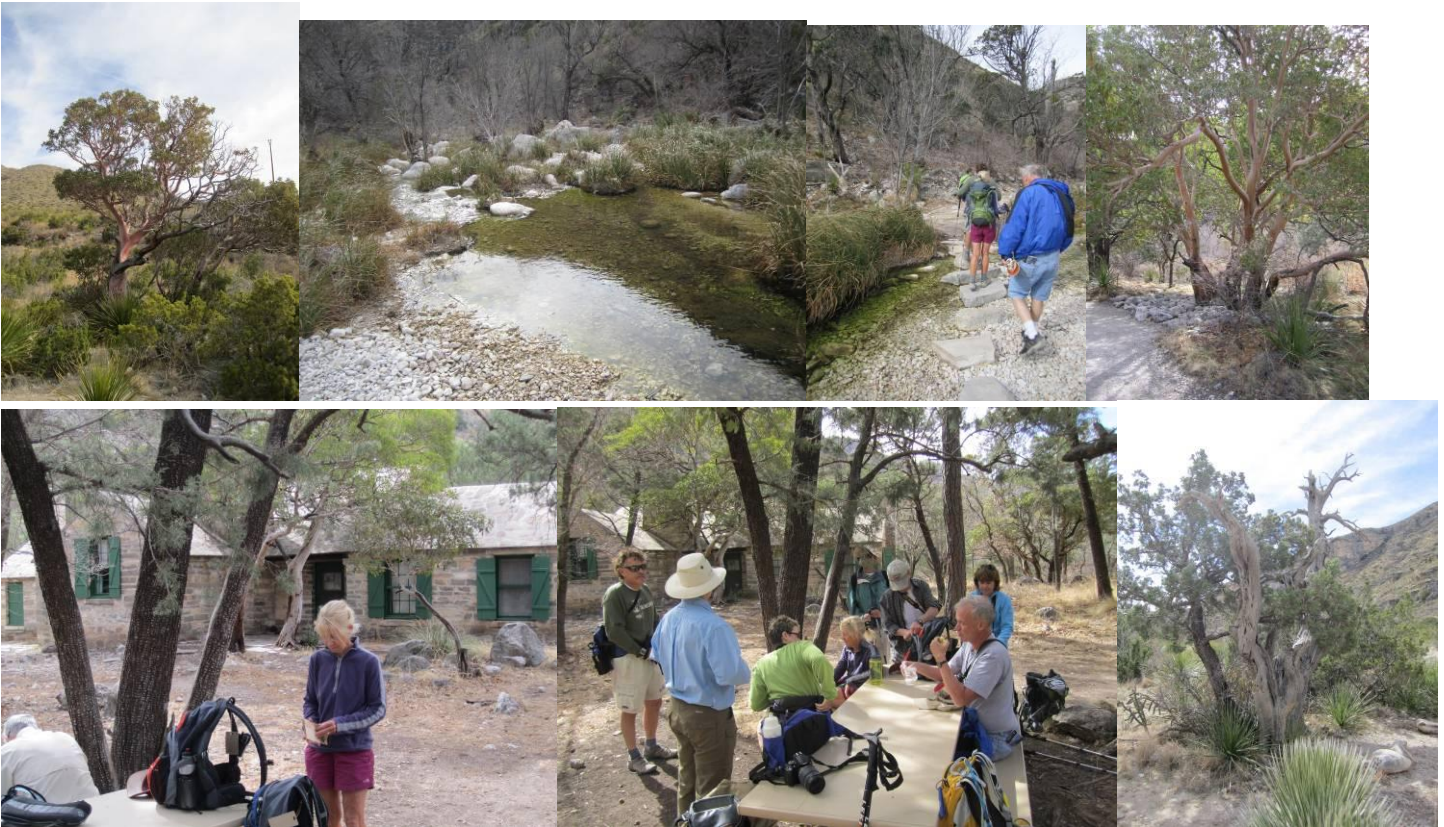
***In the Kings Palace and then walking over to the original entrance and the old town.***



*The amphitheatre for the dust bat exodus; walking down the original entrance and then looking back up from the dark to the glow of daylight; into the Big Room and the Chinese Palace.*

### **Monday, March 7 – Extender Day 2**

It's off to Guadalupe Park early the following morning. The Guadalupe's certainly look like mountains looming on the western horizon, but technically are the components of the Capitan Reef, an exposed formation of ancient marine fossils. In so many ways, Guadalupe is another reflection of the incredible diversity of the Chihuahuan Desert. We would choose the McKittrick Canyon Trail to the historic Pratt Lodge. Much of the trail followed a permanent desert stream that usually supported a lush abundance of vegetation (7 miles) but was less so in this dry spell. We did cross small streams which were a welcome change.



### **Overview/Distances**

It was a long drive back to Midland which is a down-side to this trip but the only way to see the Parks. Is it any wonder that Big Bend, despite being one of the largest of the national parks, is one of least frequented? I'd vote the drive as worth it but might not do it again whereas some hikes I'd readily do again such as the Grand Canyon, Tetons and Yellowstone and Yosemite. This area is in a class all its own and I'm grateful to those fellow hikers who in the past have encouraged me to see it.

### ***Top Reasons to Trek the Trails versus Traipsing the Streets – Let's Hike!***

- There's no pressure to get to the finish line before it closes.
- It's not only possible but entirely likely that you get to eat all day and use up all those calories.
- A good hike is worth a marathon in calories but without the pressure.
- All muscles are utilized and thus injuries are rare.
- It's hugely more interesting than traipsing the streets to trek the trails.
- Knocking off all the national parks takes less than knocking off the 50-states.
- You never need do a boring state.
- The wildlife is wild without being embarrassing.
- The injury factor is much less since all muscles are being used and there's no rush.
- Trekking poles used for balance and upper body workout are allowed.
- You'll end the day feeling refreshed, sleep well, and with no hurting.

Now don't get me wrong. I did 24 marathons in the last 12 months and I'm not totally stopping marathons so long as I'm able. I just wanted to give some of you who have been hurting or have been worrying about getting to the finish line in time or who have finished the 50-states and are looking for something else to do – some incentive. I'm seeing a wee bit of burn-out within the marathon community and maybe some diversification will help motivate us.

### ***Now what Diana?***

The next couple months are busy: "Little Bits" Marie comes to visit a couple days after I return, then we leave immediately thereafter to Italy, first to Rome for my March 20<sup>th</sup> marathon, then I'll join Tom in the wine region of Orvieto where we'll stay until the end of the month.

Early April is the Knoxville Marathon, followed by a longer trip to London for the marathon.

May 1<sup>st</sup> is the Gettysburg Marathon in celebration of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the battle, and six days later back to the same area for my fourth Capon Valley WVA 50K. A couple days later Tom and I leave to Lake Tahoe followed by the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary run of Bay-to-Breakers in San Francisco. (What do you suppose will be my costume? Not Bare-to-Breakers at this stage of life though I'd always intended to indulge in body painting.) Before the month of May is out I'll have spent a week in Grand Rapids and Traverse City, culminating in the Traverse City Marathon. I'm told that I should have a few more days to go up to Mackinaw but I need to be home for the first week of June trip to Las Vegas where I'll join friends on my 3<sup>rd</sup> Timberline Tours 6-day hiking trip of the year, this time to Bryce and Zion National Parks. When I come home Marie comes to NJ for another visit.

And so it goes. I just want to do it all and am doing my level best to keep my dance card filled. For those who think I'm crazy, I agree. I am. For those who are jealous, don't forget that you could give up a paycheck too: it's a trade off. As is life a trade off -- just full of decisions and choices. Yes, I think I have it made and couldn't be more thrilled to be able to go but I've given plenty of thought to the fact that this probably can't go on forever and I think that will be okay. I'll be all ready to sit in my rocking chair and make scrap books. But truly I never knew that retirement would be so tiring!

### ***Heard on the street***

- New Jersey Marathon sold by Devine Sports? Probably that's true as I heard it from various sources and now confirmed. It was purchased by U.S. Road Sports. They are said to also own Atlanta ING Marathon, the Miami Marathon and a bunch of other races.
- Iva Grady, creator of the Palm Beach Marathon and major force in the marathon world, has retired from marathon administration and blasting away her speed PRs. She always was fast and now

she'll really train hard. I hope to see her at Peachtree Road Race in Atlanta over the July Fourth weekend. She's heading to compete in triathlons.

- El Paso Marathon had a couple thousand runners and I was right in the neighborhood but chose to hike Guadalupe National Park instead. Wish we could do EVERYTHING and not have to choose.
- And not heard: I'm going to have to decide if I want to be a hermit as that's what eventually happens when one misses out in conversations or I'm going to give in to a hearing aid. It's easy to look really stupid when you don't hear: once you fill in the blanks and figure out what someone was talking about, you're behind and then dare not participate.
- Desserts? No way for this recent hiking group. They were a bit older, a bit thinner, and very careful about their diet. It's interesting how different groups eat so differently. This group was mostly with a 'one plate' mentality.
- From Elaine, the RD of Leading Ladies and the most amazing gal you can imagine. Remember her picture from Athens Marathon? "I want your life! Beautiful pictures; what a trip. I've been to Maui...I enjoyed the re-run. Sooooo, France for my birthday? I'll be 74 on Sept. 7...seems like a good time to run in my ancestral country. Have a powerful day, I'm off to school and, yes, I signed on for another year. Staying home does not seem a good option. Take care beautiful, see you on the road." Earlier email: "Mornin' beautiful....I was considering Medoc as well; my two "bookends" might come. I will be in school, so have to see how to work that out. My grandfather came from France when he was 16 and my first son was born in Verdun (military)...so I am called...."
- From Dave and Dana: Dana declared when we did Boston in '06 that she'd never do another marathon and she's been true to her word. But now she says that if I'll finish my 50-states, she'll do my last one with me. Quite a concession by a very giving and good friend. It makes it tempting, but here I am looking at Munich Marathon as my 6<sup>th</sup> foreign marathon of the year instead . . . .
- From a dear friend who I'm not sure it's fair to name but who inspires me constantly: We had a study session today having to do with values and mission, etc. The leader quoted the King of Bhutan who values the Gross National Happiness rather than the Gross National Product. I like that. The Gross National Happiness. I figure you and I are contributing to the Gross National Happiness by running around soaking up wonderful experiences and BEING HAPPY doing it. So, it appears that we're actually doing the human race a favor!!! Imagine that! Having fun and helping the world at the same time!!! Just imagine what an injustice religion has done by trying to squelch happiness in favor of piety. Total BS. Here's to happiness!! Pardon me while I pour myself a glass of wine and drink to that!

***On that note – goodnight!***

With a view from the park's restaurant.





## ***Itinerary***

### **Sat Feb 26**

Surfside Marathon – about 1 1/2 hour outside of Houston – see separate itinerary

### **Sun, Feb 27**

2:40pm Depart Houston International via CO#5819 to Midland/Odessa TX

4:06pm Arrive Midland/Odessa TX (airport is between Midland and Odessa)

Taxi to hotel – no shuttles available per Dick - Midessa Taxi 432 337 5501

Hotel Hampton Inn at Odessa  
3923 John Ben Sheppard Pkwy, Odessa, TX 79762 Tele 432-363-2900

### **Mon Feb 28**

Assembly Point: Midland, TX with Timberline van shuttle between Midland and Big Bend N.P. prior to and following tour)

#### **Daily Itinerary**

Day 1	The Windows Trail. (5.5 miles - approx 500 ft elevation gain); overnight at Chisos Mountain Lodge	5.5 miles
Day 2	The South Rim Loop: Pinnacles, Boot Canyon, Northeast/Southeast Rims, South Rim, Laguna Meadow (14 miles - approx 2,000-ft elevation gain); overnight at Chisos Mountain Lodge	14 miles
Day 3	Mule Ears Peaks (6 miles); Santa Elena Canyon (3 miles); overnight at Chisos Mountain Lodge	9 miles
Day 4	(morning) - Lost Mine (6 miles - 1,100-foot elevation gain); (afternoon) - Big Bend State Park - Closed Canyon (3 miles)	9 miles
Day 5	Raft Trip (or canoe in low-water conditions) - Santa Elena Canyon on Rio Grande	
Day 6	Burro Mesa Pour-off (4 miles - approx 500-foot elevation differential)	4 miles

**Total Hiking Mileage - 41.5 miles**

Description: Nestled in the southwest corner of Texas, not close enough to any major city to provide any meaningful clue as to its location, Big Bend requires a little scrutiny to understand its remote and wild character. The park is situated along a 107-mile stretch of the Rio Grande, including that point where the river turns sharply to the north (hence, its name, “Big Bend”). This section of the Rio Grande is protected as a Wild and Scenic River and the spectacular limestone gorges through which the river flows are among the astonishing, varied natural features contained within the park’s boundaries. The vast Chihuahan Desert, extending northward from Mexico, dominates a considerable expanse of the park, but standing in stark contrast to the desert lowlands are the rugged, forested Chisos Mountains, whose peaks reach an elevation of 8,000’. Without a doubt, Big Bend offers some of the wildest and unspoiled land remaining in the “lower 48”.

We’ve planned our Big Bend program for early spring—the absolute best time to visit this park. With an estimated 1,100 plant species, 430 species of birds and a wide range of other wildlife, including gray fox, pronghorn antelope and mule deer, spring is an exciting season in this desert environment.

We’ve structured this program in a manner that will provide the varied experiences that are the essence of Big Bend. We’ll hike the high country of the Chisos, explore the erosional landscapes of the Window, the Chihuahan Desert environment and the breathtaking gorges carved by the Rio Grande. A full-day’s raft journey on the Rio Grande in spectacular Santa Elena Canyon is another dramatic feature of this program.

### **Mon, Feb 28 – Day 1**

8:00am Meet in lobby of Hampton Inn for van shuttle to start – be in hiking clothes  
Mid-pm We'll assemble mid-afternoon of Day 1 at the Chisos Mountain Lodge, our home for the next five nights (we'll provide a van shuttle from Midland to the park earlier that day). We'll arrive early enough to hike leisurely along the Windows Trail to the spectacular Window, a pour-off that offers a magnificent view of the desert lowlands (4 miles).

Hotel Chisos Mountain Lodge in Big Bend Park, the National Park Lodge  
Big Bend National Park, TX 79834-999 Tele 915 477 2291

### **Tue, Mar 1 – Day 2**

Early the following morning, we'll hike from the lodge into the Chisos as we head for the South Rim on what generally is recognized as the quintessential hike in Texas. The views along the trail of much of the Big Bend country extending into Mexico are unsurpassed (13 miles).

### **Wed, Mar 2 – Day 3**

We'll head south from the Chisos Basin along the Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive on Day 3 to the Mule Ears Trailhead. Our hike to the base of Mule Ears Peaks will showcase the incredible beauty of the Chihuahuan Desert at a time when the Chihuahuan well may be in full spring bloom. The variety of cacti, yucca, ocotillo and other desert plants along the trail is truly amazing (7 miles). Following our Mule Ears hike, we'll drive to the end of the Ross Maxwell Road and hike along the Rio Grande into the mouth of Santa Elena Canyon (2 miles).

### **Thu, Mar 3 – Day 4**

We've planned a relatively moderate hike to Lost Mine for Day 4, our final trek in the Chisos highlands (7 miles). Later that afternoon, we'll van shuttle to Terlingua with time to explore this old mining camp before an awesome dinner at the Starlight Theater.

### **Fri, Mar 4 – Day 5**

On Day 5, we'll join Big Bend River Tours for a full-day rafting (or canoeing, depending on river flow) adventure on the Rio Grande as it twists through the Santa Elena Gorge. The sheer limestone walls that line the gorge soar 1,500 feet above the river. We'll spend a final evening at the Chisos Lodge.

### **Sat, Mar 5 – Day 6**

Hike leisurely through the narrowing canyon atop Burro Mesa the following morning to the spectacular pour-off at the mesa's southern edge (4 miles). We'll then shuttle back to Midland later in the day.

Hotel: Best Western Stevens Inn – 2 nights  
1829 South Canal Street, Carlsbad, NM 88220-6517 Tele: 575 887-2851

### **Sun, Mar 6 – Extender Day 1**

Big Bend Extender: Carlsbad Caverns & Guadalupe National Parks - The opportunity to bag another of our national parks is irresistible. We'll visit the labyrinth of Carlsbad Caverns National Park, overnight in Carlsbad, and then head down the road to Guadalupe National Park.

One of the largest and most astounding cave systems in the world, Carlsbad Caverns National Park is actually comprised of a network of over 100 known caves within the porous limestone bowels of the Guadalupe Mountains of southeastern New Mexico. The park is situated about 170 miles northwest of the Midland/Odessa area or about a 3-hour drive from the assembly location for our Big Bend Hike. The point being—how can we resist a visit to Carlsbad since we're in the neighborhood anyway?

We'll give our Big Bend hikers an opportunity to take a shower, maybe do some laundry, have dinner and a good night's sleep. Following a picnic lunch at the Caverns, we'll spend much of the afternoon exploring the spectacular Big Room, with its incredibly dramatic formations. We'll enter the caverns and follow the Natural Entrance Route, which simulates the basic route utilized by early explorers. We'll descend some 750 feet on a switch-backing trail illuminated, fortunately, by the park service.

Hotel: Best Western Stevens Inn – 2nd night  
1829 South Canal Street, Carlsbad, NM 88220-6517 Tele: 575 887-2851

### **Mon, Mar 7 – Extender Day 2**

It's off to Guadalupe Park early the following morning. The Guadalupe's certainly look like mountains looming on the western horizon, but technically are the components of the Capitan Reef, an exposed formation of ancient marine fossils. In so many ways, Guadalupe is another reflection of the incredible diversity of the Chihuahuan Desert.

Our choice of hikes will be dictated by weather and trail conditions, but among those choices is the McKittrick Canyon Trail, from the Visitors' Center beyond the historic Pratt Lodge to the Grotto. For much of its course, the trail follows a permanent desert stream that supports a lush abundance of vegetation (7 miles). We'll ultimately return to Midland late afternoon with arrival by 6pm.

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### **Tue, Mar 8**

10:53am Depart Midland/Odessa (MAF) via Cont#2088  
12:17pm Arrive Houston Bush Intl (IAH) for plane change  
1:10pm Depart Houston IAH via Cont#810  
5:39pm Arrive Newark EWR

### **Packing**

Bathing suit or running clothing; trekking poles; water shoes

From Dick on 12/19/11: We'll spend all five nights at the Chisos Mountain Lodge in Big Bend Park, the National Park Lodge. Our pre-and post-tour hotel in Odessa will be the Hampton Inn. For the Extender, we'll be at the Best Western Stevens Inn in Carlsbad, NM. The vast majority of the people doing Big Bend are also doing the Extender. Our plan will be to go directly to Carlsbad from Big Bend, rather than going back to Odessa, spending the night of March 5 at the Hampton Inn, and then driving to Carlsbad the next morning. Far less driving by doing it this way. That will translate into spending two nights at the Stevens Inn in Carlsbad, rather than one.

Dick, when asked if it was safe for me to do a marathon the day before: Tuesday's (Day 2) hike, when we do the South rim of the Chisos (13 miles) is the only challenging day that rises to Grand Canyon proportions, but not nearly the elevation gain as our climb up from Phantom Ranch. If you recall the Clouds Rest hike in Yosemite that was more difficult than anything we do in Big Bend. Big Bend has enough challenge to insure that you won't in any way be bored, but still not a difficult program.

National Parks visited or with immediate plans to visit:

Acadia Maine  
Badlands South Dakota  
Big Bend Texas  
Biscayne Florida  
Black Canyon of the Gunnison Colorado  
Bryce Canyon Utah  
Carlsbad Caverns New Mexico  
Death Valley California, Nevada  
Denali Alaska  
Everglades Florida  
Glacier Montana  
Grand Canyon Arizona  
Grand Teton Wyoming  
Great Smoky Mountains North Carolina, Tennessee  
Guadalupe Mountains Texas  
Haleakala Hawaii  
Hawaii Volcanoes Hawaii  
Hot Springs Arkansas  
Joshua Tree California  
Kenai Fjords Alaska  
Kings Canyon California  
Mammoth Cave Kentucky  
Mesa Verde Colorado  
Mount Rainier Washington  
North Cascades Washington  
Olympic Washington  
Petrified Forest Arizona  
Redwood California  
Rocky Mountain Colorado  
Saguaro Arizona  
Sequoia California  
Shenandoah Virginia  
Wind Cave South Dakota ?  
Yellowstone Wyoming, Montana, Idaho  
Yosemite California  
Zion Utah