

New Mexico 2002

I have survived a five-day Geological Field trip in New Mexico. I was really worried about rattle snakes and cacti, but the rest of my class were more concerned about getting proper hiking boots. So, we all went shopping together and I was amazed with the inclined ramps in the store for us to test out the boots. I wore mine to classes to break them in. The day I wore them under a long skirt, my lecturer, Gary told me he worried about me.

The day we arrived in New Mexico, Gary met us at the airport, treated us to a Mexican lunch, then immediately started making stops to look at rock formations. I was in traveling clothes as I did not realize we would be at it so soon. Gary mentioned that for the last three weeks I was constantly in my hiking boots and here I was standing on the rocks without them. Antony, who wore his boots on the flight, was looking particularly smug.

The class split up and Jim, Antony and I were in one car. Cesar ended up travelling with the lecturers. As we drove across the desert landscape Jim suddenly got all excited and pointed out a "dust devil". Antony said that they are called "willy willies" in Australia. I turned to Jim asked him if there were times when he wanted to laugh at some of the words we used. Jim was British and the rest of us represented Australia, Trinidad and Colombia. Jim, without hesitating replied, "All the time, actually". We did however agree that "willy willy" was more fun to say than dust devil and continued pointing them out to each other in the drive.

The most challenging hike for me was the Guadalupe mountain - going uphill 1000 feet in the blazing hot sun and side stepping the cacti that grew on the mountain *and* keeping an eagle eye out for the snakes. We had come across one dead rattlesnake at ground level the day before so in my mind you could not be too careful. Once I got to the designated height and had seen the facies we were supposed to see I headed back down the hill. I needed to get to the restroom at the bottom since Antony in his infinite wisdom made me drink a bottle of water every hour – he had served in the Australian army and was concerned about dehydration. Once I was on the ground and had visited the facilities I got my binoculars out and watched as Jim and Antony went racing up the side of the mountain to the top which was further 1000 feet up. I was quite content to sit in the shade, route through the various snacks we had brought and chat with Cesar.

We also visited the Carlsbad caverns. We hiked down more than 800 feet and got to a place where they had hewn out an area for restrooms, gift shop and café. This is America after all. The scene made me think of those old James Bond movies. I expected to see a golf cart come around the corner with men in white coats. The stalagmite and stalactite formations were awesome, and each cavern seemed more amazing than the last. Some of the rock formations looked like giant rashers of bacon.

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Whenever we got back to the hotel, we'd plan to meet back for dinner which was always Mexican. We usually had just enough time to shower but one day we had a whole hour to ourselves, so I spent it taking a tub bath. When we got together for dinner one of the guys said since we had so much time, he took a three-mile run. I just concentrated hard on my food hoping nobody would ask what I had been doing. Why would anyone need more exercise when every day we were climbing up and down hills?

We went to a karaoke bar one night and an older American came over to me and asked where we were from, he had apparently been listening to all our accents. I was a little surprised when he wrote the countries down. Someone else told me that the man ran the karaoke side of the bar. Then later that night I saw he was on the stage and he dedicated the next song to our group and proceeded to do his version, complete with dancing, of "La Vida Loca". Now I used to think Ricky Martin's dance was silly but that was nothing compared to what we were treated to that night. I thought I was going to fall off my stool laughing.

So, despite my fears of rattle snakes and cacti, I enjoyed the field trip immensely.

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