

Dear Friends and Relatives,

Greetings from Deming, New Mexico.

We have to put out this quickie newsletter because we are not where we said we would be. We certainly don't want any of our RV traveling buddies to look for us in the wrong place.

As our two weeks at the Western Horizons park in Saint David, Arizona came to an end, we realized we only had time for about one more exciting tourist attraction. We chose to visit **Kartchner Caverns State Park**. If you get anywhere near Kartchner Caverns take the tour. We have been in many cave systems, but none as pristine and preserved as Kartchner. This is a "must see" attraction.

If you have an RV, you can take it to the park and camp there. RV spaces are \$22 a night. If you drive in by car or motorcycle, there is a \$5 parking charge. There are actually two cave tours. One is open all year and costs about \$18 per person. The second tour is only open part of the year to protect the migrating bat population. This tour is about \$22 per person. We would not do both in the same day. As caves go, these are very high prices, but you know what? It's worth it!



Kartchner Caverns Visitor Center

The visitor center is magnificent. If you get a chance to visit Kartchner, be sure to see the free 45 minute movie on the history of the caves before you tour the caves. Knowing the background and what the discoverers went through will greatly enhance the cave experience.

Kartchner Caverns State Park, opened in 1999, is one of Arizona's newest wonders. Kartchner Caverns is a stunning limestone cave system considered one of the top ten in the world. Discovered in 1974 by explorers Randy Tufts and Gary Tenen, and not revealed until 1988, the opportunity existed to preserve the caverns in near pristine condition. We have never seen a cave in such perfect condition. There are no broken formations and no graffiti. The beautifully built trail system blends perfectly with the cave and keeps visitors far enough away from formations that no damage can be done. This is a wet and living cave system, and is growing now just as it was before the pyramids and before Christ. You enter the system via an elaborate airlock system so that the dry outside air cannot get into the cave. The temperature in the cave is about 70 degrees and the humidity is 99-100 percent. You cannot bring anything into the cave. No food, no water, no camera, no purse, no backpack, nothing, nada. The park

is dedicated to having this cave system preserved for thousands of years.

Seeing the movie and visiting this cave is a very emotional and powerful experience. If you get the chance, don't pass it up. You will remember it for years! On the day that we went the only tour available was the lower cost tour. The number of people allowed to visit these caves is tightly controlled. Either make reservations or show up early in the morning. They hold back 100 tickets each day for drop-in visitors, but the 100 tickets are usually gone by 10 a.m.



"Soda Straw" formations in the Rotunda Room.

Soda Straw formations are hollow calcium carbonate tubes which are formed when mineralized water drips through their centers. They grow at the rate of perhaps one inch per century. Their paper-thin walls can be broken with a touch. Kartchner is home to the second longest soda straw in the world, measuring an unbelievable 21 feet, 2 inches! We have seen soda straws before, but never any as long as these. The Rotunda Room is the first stop in the tour.



"Kubla Khan" formation in the Throne Room.

The Kubla Khan formation pictured above is huge, about 60 feet tall. The Throne Room is huge. Perhaps the size of an auditorium. The photo doesn't begin to do justice to this room. This room is the last on the tour. Here you will sit for a few minutes with changing light patterns and beautiful music. The original discoverers found the room with carbide miner's lamps on their helmets. Their lamps would only illuminate about 15 feet. After that all they saw was blackness. They knew they had discovered something very big, but unlike today's visitors, they didn't have the illumination to know just how big. As you sit in the semi-darkness, your mind can't help but wonder what their feelings must have been.

Evidence of prehistoric life has also been found in the cave, including the skeleton of an 80,000 year old Shasta ground sloth. The cave is also home to about 1,000 female bats from April to September.

The bats give birth to their pups here, nurse them, then return to Mexico for the winter.

So we know that this living cave system has been growing for more than 80,000 years. As you sit in the semi-darkness, the age of this cave has to affect your sense of reality. You are looking at something that is over 80,000 years old and it is still growing and changing. Considering the birth of Christ was only a little over 2,000 years ago, the 80,000 number is very difficult to appreciate. It is a powerful and emotional realization. It is for this reason that we recommend not taking two tours in one day. What you have experienced needs time to soak into consciousness.

After Kartchner Caverns, we packed up and headed for Deming, New Mexico. You might ask "why." We would answer, "why not?" We haven't been to New Mexico and that was a good enough reason. We had planned to spend two weeks at **Hidden Valley Ranch RV Resort**. Well, it is hidden all right. It takes 8 miles of very dusty washboard dirt road to get there. It's kind of neat when you get to this desolate valley in the desert, but we couldn't stay. Once you're there, your rig is completely coated with dust and you can taste it. We had to be able to travel in and out to get to the post office so that Donna could work on taxes. No way on a motorcycle. Every car in the valley is already filthy so the drivers don't care about the dust and roar into town at about 30 miles per hour creating clouds of dust. One trip to town on the motorcycle and the bike, us, and our clothes would be solid brown. So after just one night, we drove into Deming and set up residence at **Escapees Dreamcatcher RV Park** where we are now. This is a beautiful little park, reasonably priced, and they let you wash your RV. Boy, did it need it. We got here March 22 and we'll probably stay until March 31.



The Thing, I-10, a little east of Benson, Arizona.

On the way out of Arizona on Interstate 10, there it was. An honest to goodness tourist trap where you could pay to see "**The Thing**." When you were a kid, did your parents tell you "no" and drive right on by? Now that you are older, are you still driving right on by? Not us. No sir, we want to stop and see it all and so we did. The Thing was a great stop. Lots of RV parking, great second breakfast, huge souvenir shop, and for only \$1 you could visit an interesting museum and actually see The Thing which reportedly had been found in the local area. What is The Thing? We aren't telling. We wouldn't spoil your fun for the world. If you can get back into being a kid, you'll want the experience for yourself.

New Mexico calls itself the "Land of Enchantment." I'm not sure we are enchanted, but we are certainly charmed. We want to see more. On the 31st we may go about 60 miles further east and check out Las Cruces. After that, we will come back through Deming and then head north to see Silver City, New Mexico. Our previous schedule called for April 5 through April 19 in Casa Grande, Arizona, but we may not go there as it's likely to be too darn hot. Just as soon as tax season is over, we will start heading for northern California and back to Redding. We might stop in Stockton, California for the Escapees Spring Rally April 22 through April 27. Not sure.

Until next time, home is where you park it.

Chuck & Donna