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Subject: Postcard

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Today we went to Carlsbad Caverns. Your mind leaps ahead – oh no, spare us stalactites and stalagmites. Sorry, that's what's in caverns.

There are two ways to the "Big Room", you can take the elevator down 750 feet or walk down a mile long paved trail that starts at a huge natural opening some distance from the lifts. Our plan was to hoof it. So, we got to the natural entrance (paving and handrails qualify as natural when they are compared to elevators) and got a lecture from The Natural Ranger – I tied my shoes while Sheila said uh-huh. We proceeded.



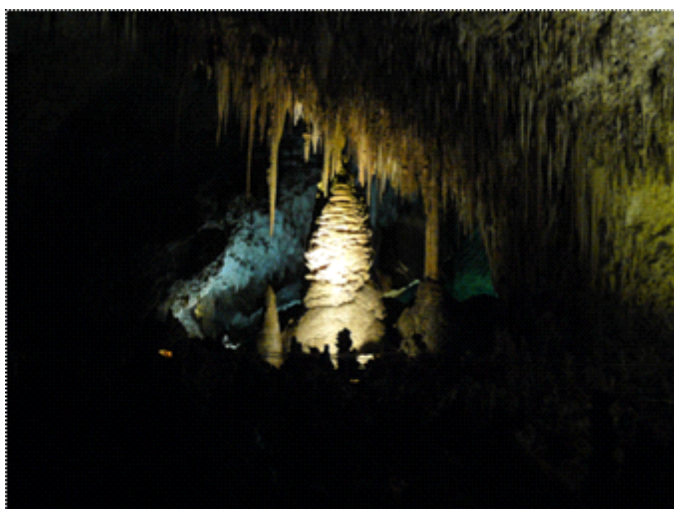
The natural entrance is also a natural exit for cave swallows who leave their nests in the morning to hunt, and a variety of bats who leave their roosts in the evening to do the same. It was morning so we saw swallows; besides, the bats were hibernating; and more besides, you're not allowed to take pictures of the bats.



We went down, down, down, dodging shadowy figures that were unresponsive to our presence. In a while we adjusted

to the darkness and discovered that the shadowy figures were oblivious, like drivers on cell phones, because they were listening to the Cavern Audio Guide. And what we were missing because we didn't have a Cavern Audio Guide was "the stimulating commentary of park rangers, geologists and cavers—complete with music, interviews and sound effects".

But our loss was our gain. Here, presented without music, interviews or sound effects, are a few of the things we saw.



And no picture could capture the size and grandeur of the whole cave. Although we're sure the right music would. Maybe if you hummed The 1812 Overture...

OK, time for the return to the top – 750 feet – comparable to a 75 story building – a mile of narrow switchbacks – in the dark!



We carbed-up on granola bars and oatmeal cookies in the snack bar. We hydrated with bottles of water. Now where was that trail to the top? Here? Nope. Here? Nope. Better ask directions. We went to the snack bar and asked the guys there. Arched eyebrows. Reluctance to answer. "The only way out is the elevator". Huh? "You are not allowed to walk back up". Huh? Yes, the Elevator Ranger confirmed, unless you have a special permit, there is no walking out of Carlsbad Cavern.

All carbed up and nowhere to go. We elevated to the top.

Tomorrow: the nucleus of our trip.

D&S