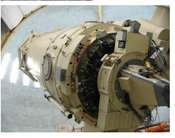
East to Texas and Louisiana

Well it is now March and Bob & I are arriving in El Paso, TX. I was still getting over the effects of the flu so we stayed a few extra days here to recuperate. We met a new HR couple here, Paula & Gerald Fenner, who we got to know. Through our contacts they decided to join the 400 chapter. Our next stop was to be Alpine, TX and we were beginning to wonder about the weather as it has still been quite cool. Arriving in Alpine it was down right chilly during the day and cold at night, but we were 4,500 ft above sea level. This is another one of those places that is remote from the rest of the civilized world. We never did get down to Big Bend National Park as it would have been another 100 mile drive to get to it and really see anything. We had plenty to do where we were. We visited Fort Davis, a National Historic Site. The Army Post, established in 1854 is one of the best examples of a restored frontier fort in the country. It is also extremely scenic as it is set at the base of some very interesting cliffs. See pictures below. We also spent a whole day at the McDonald observatory which we found especially interesting. It was quite an educational experience. It is considered to be one of the major astronomical research facilities in the world. As we walked up to the visitor center, there was a man outside the door with his own telescope inviting people to look at Saturn with it's rings, etc. He was not even part of the Observatory Staff, just doing this on his own. The Visitor Center, had some great exhibits and a theater. We had a great tour of the facility, participated in day time solar viewing demonstrations, as well as the night time star party, which ended with another opportunity to look through a telescope. We had a great time and would go back again in a heart beat. Outside of Alpine was a viewing station to see the Marfa Mystery Lights, which can be seen most nights. We stopped to read the sign but it was too cold to stay and look for the lights. No one really knows what causes this phenomenon. The pictures of the Observatory will be to the right in an effort to keep them



Visiting with friends is always a highlight and we did so when in Texas. Ed & Kay Lee, now past members, still friends are just as active with the chapter as they ever were!! They do have a nice comfortable little house on the property of their daughter and son-in-law on the South East edge of San Antonio. We called and met them for lunch one day and then followed them back to their home. It is on the size of a small guest house and meets their needs nicely. There is plenty of room for them to park their truck and fifth wheel. We spent a great afternoon chatting, checking out their electronic gadgets, and discussing the issue of people like ourselves having a 'realistic exit plan' from this life style. The next day we were leaving the area and Ed & Kay were not going to be far behind as we were all heading for the South West Rally in Rayne, LA and the Chapter 400 Spring Rally in Foley, AL.

Smith Family News Highlights!

After leaving Alpine, TX we headed for Boerne, TX and arrived on March 9th. As always we had a great visit and enjoyed Easter dinner with everyone at Brenda's sisters ranch house in the greater San Antonio area. It was good to see everyone again, share a wonderful Easter dinner, watch the children search for Easter Eggs hidden all over the ranch grounds and their excitement upon finding their stash! The youngest ones needed a little help from the adults. This all took place the day before we left Boerne, as the next day we took off for Beaumont, TX.

During the first week of our stay, we all took a ride up to the family lake house on the shores of Lake Buchanan. It was a great day for a ride and the Lake was beautiful. This was a real vacation retreat, although many people do live up there year round. The community was made up of rustic country homes, pads for mobile recreational vehicles, as well as middle to upscale homes. Quite a mixture. Kevin & Brenda frequently join family on weekends at this location. See pictures below.

During our stay, the four of us looked at some interesting model homes in the area. This was in conjunction with our ongoing discussion of what we might do when we get ready to get off the road. Having an exit plan is important.

HRRVC South West Rally in Rayne, LA

Well, we made it safely to the South West Rally as did our friends, Ed & Kay and many of our other chapter 400 friends. This rally was quite a bit smaller than previous years, which probably reflects high fuel prices. Most of us came in the gate together so we could park together. Most days we got together at 4 o'clock for our socials. See the picture below. Also below is a picture of a farmer emptying crawfish traps into his boat in his rice field. You read right! The crawfish live in the rice fields which are native to the soil in LA. Farmers harvest crawfish and rice from the same fields. We went on a tour and had a delicious lunch at one such farm. In addition, this farmer had a wonderful collection of JOHN DEER toys and equipment, which he turned into a kind of museum. This is where we had our lunch.

While here, Bob & I had a maintenance problem, our commode broke! These electric commodes can be real annoying! We did find a mobile repairman to come look at it, and of course a part had to be ordered. Well in Rayne, LA 'a rush' means 4 to 5 days, as we found out. It is just that everyone has such a laid back attitude. It wasn't his toilet that broke! We actually had to stay after the rally was over and find another park to stay at. Bill & Peg felt sorry for us and stayed back with us. We finally got it fixed, and were on our way to Foley, AL. The good news is that it was covered under the warranty. I have a new found appreciation for my commode!!