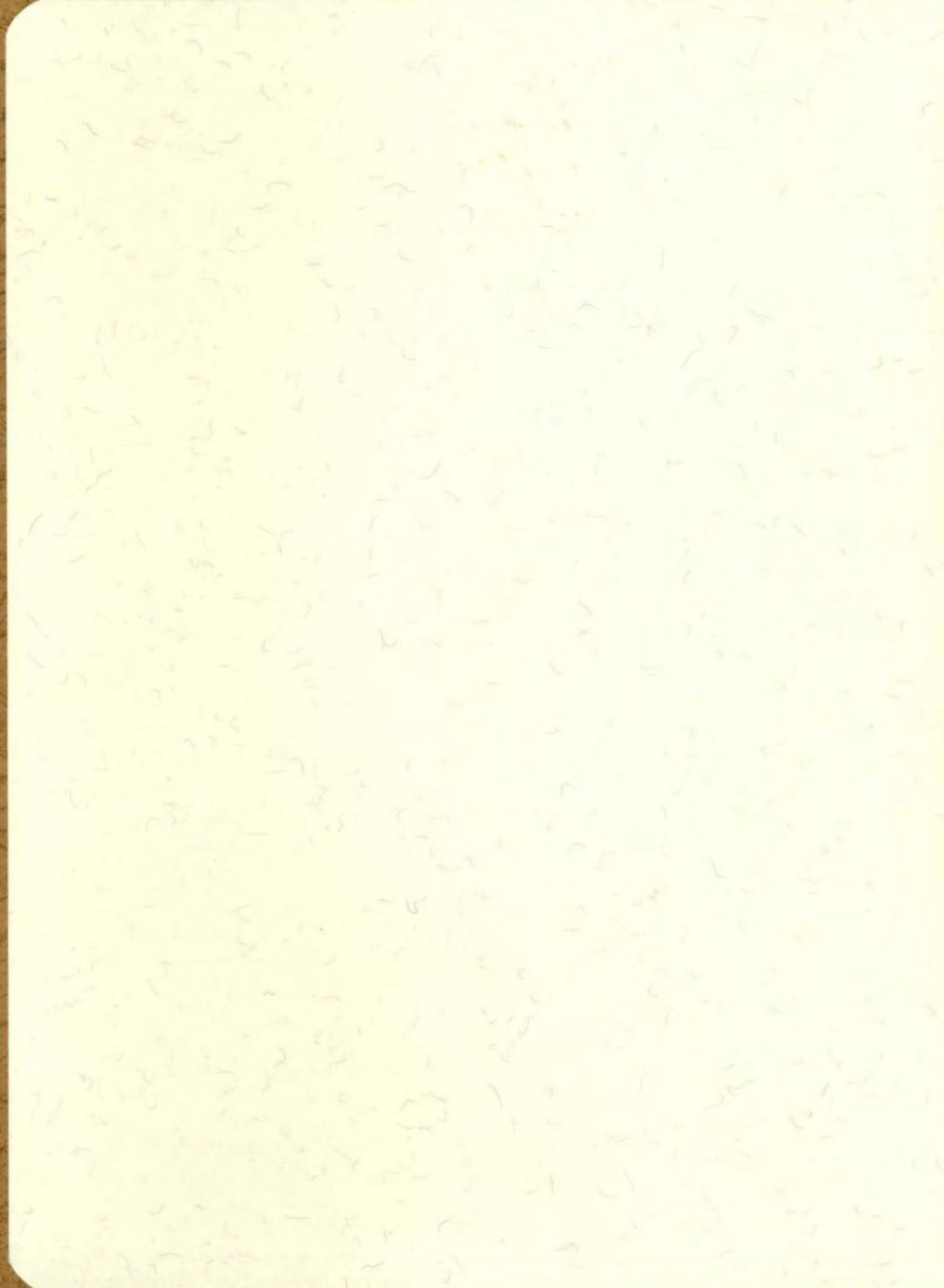
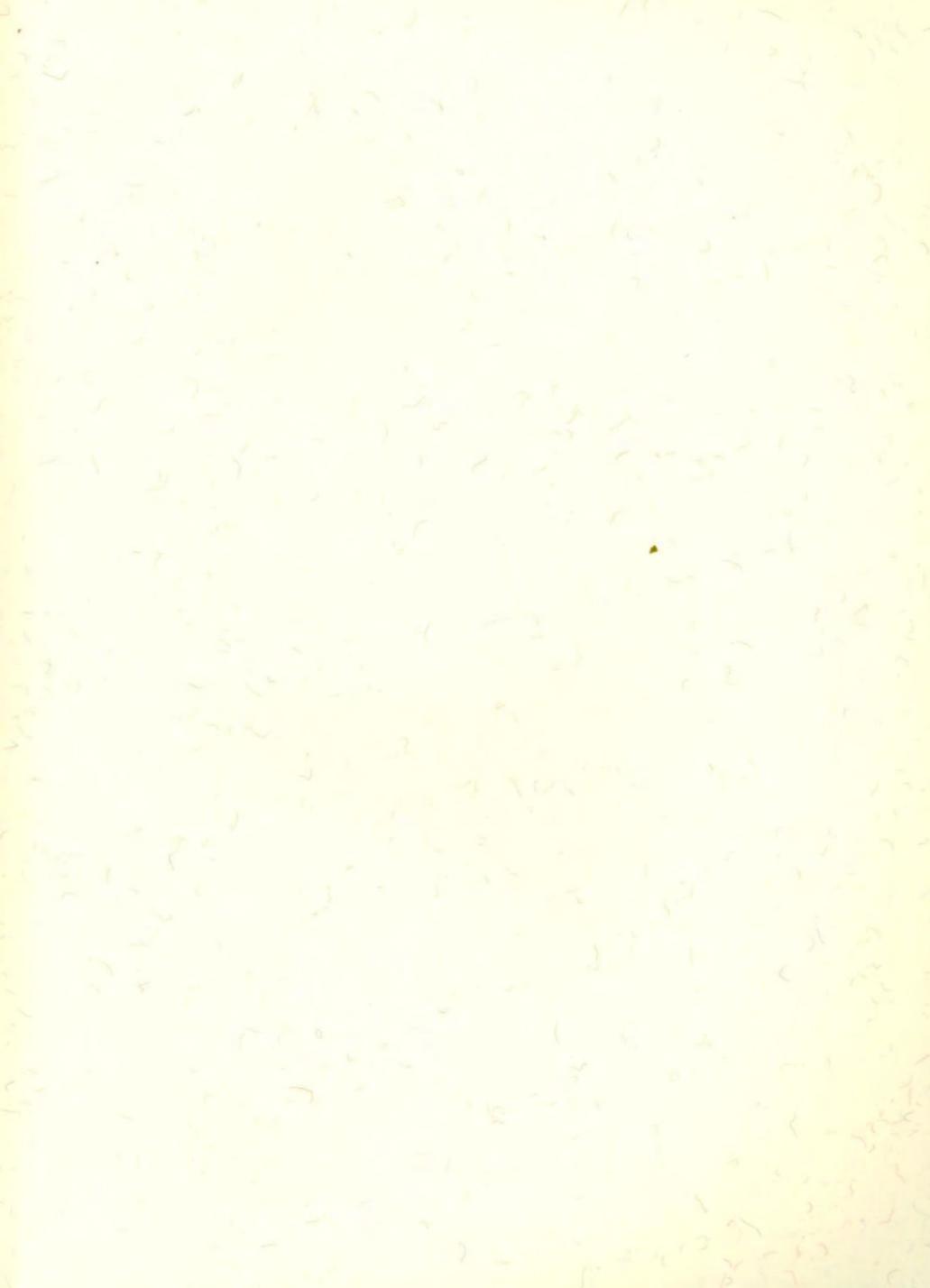
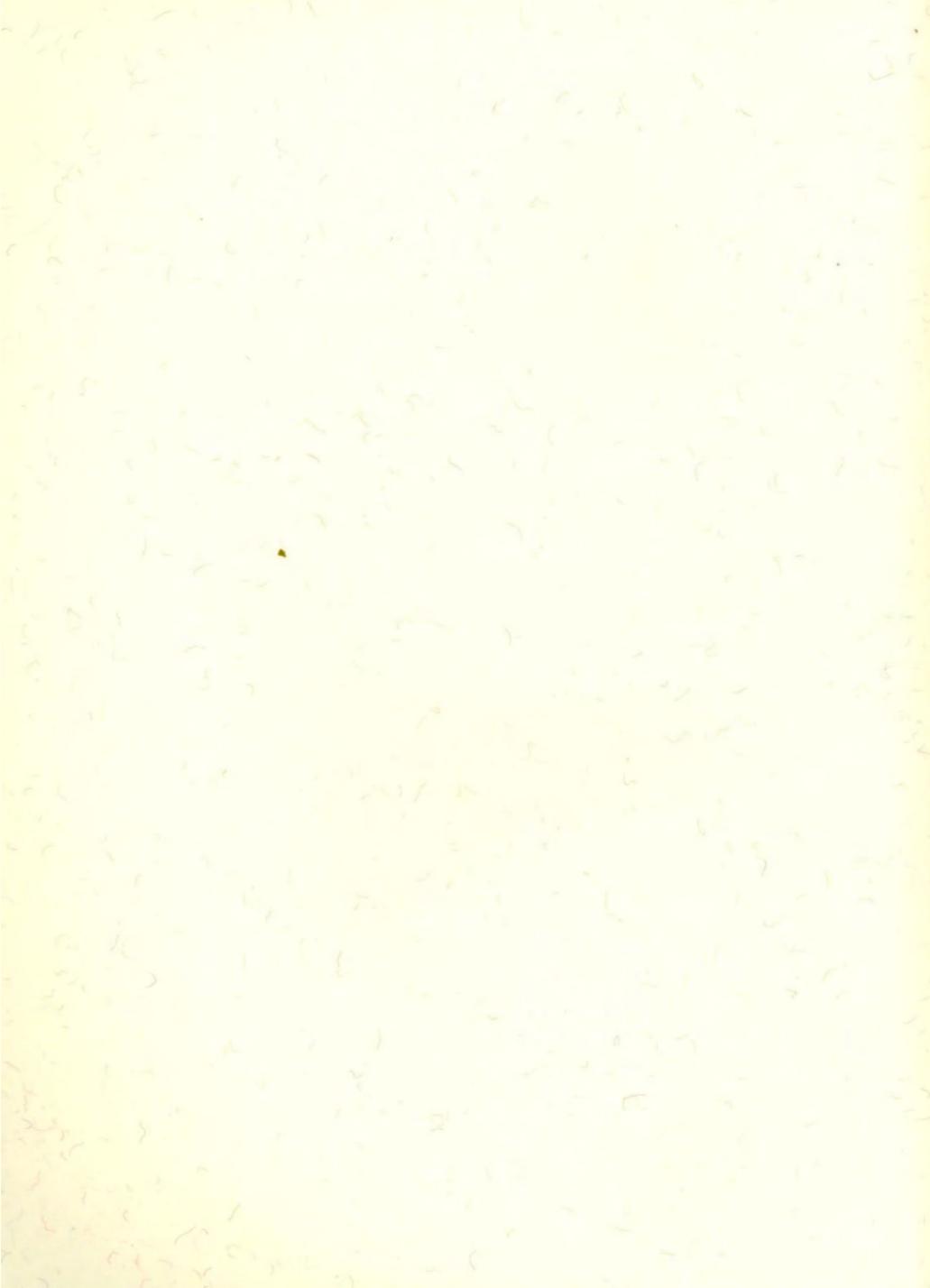


Volume 1









Cleft Location Project
Volume 1

-Ainia



Wednesday 9 May 2012

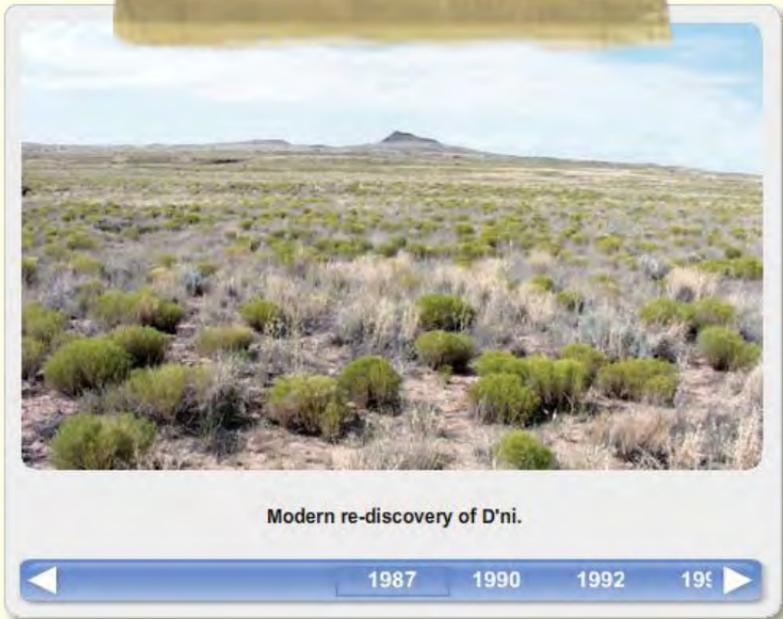
Although my old journal was originally intended to be devoted to working out the Cleft location, it rapidly evolved into something else entirely. And recent events have gotten me refocused on this old enigma...

So I'm starting a new journal to be dedicated exclusively to my research and work on the Cleft location.

* * * *

Earlier today, I posted a topic on the MOULA forums to assess whether there are other explorers who are interested in this puzzle. Since I haven't been able to spend much time on research for quite a while now, it would be really

helpful if there were others who are interested
and have the time to help with the research.
Keeping fingers crossed...



The DRC web site photo of the Cleft as originally
re-discovered.

Monday 14 May 2012

Checked the forums tonight and there were several responses! Woot!! I'd been worried that I was going to be flying solo with this project.

One explorer, Poji Bonzai, is also a New Mexico native, though I have no idea which part of the state is home for him. But he agrees with me that based on the few pictures we do have, the Cleft must be located in northern New Mexico rather than south in Eddy County. And he's interested in tagging along if I ever get to the point of doing some research road trips here. Nice!!

Did some hunting about with Google Earth and found a nice possibility in western New Mexico near Grants. There's a whole series of

extinct volcanoes there, called the Chain of Craters. Cerro Americano in particular is intriguing since it has a small white structure on its northern side. I can just imagine that it's Zandi's trailer...



The white structure is nestled at the base toward the right.

Saturday 26 May 2012

Got a nice response on the forums from sideshow118 with a clue about the Prima Guide photos. Was able to look up the reference (luckily, I'd stashed a PDF copy of that guide on my hard drive). Yes, there is indeed a second picture of the caldera in there, taken at a much closer distance during the rainy season (I surmise from the rampant greenery). There are some telltale power lines in the sky, which implies that it's located relatively near civilization.

It's helpful to see that its shape is easily recognizable at this range too. Although the overall shape is not unusual in terms of volcanic erosion, it still has a distinctive tip on the left with the sloping shoe-shape on the right.



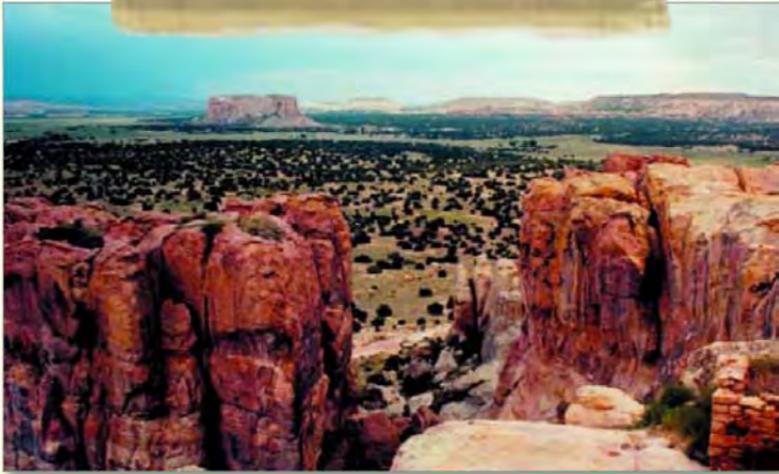
A second photo of the Cleft caldera, from the Prima Guide.

I was able to use Google Earth to track the major power lines from Taos down toward Albuquerque and am pretty confident that the power lines in the photo must be of the shorter, local variety.



Some Cyantists wandering the desert scrubland of New Mexico, from the Prima Guide.

But along similar lines, I noted that one of the Prima Guide photos was of a very colorful unnamed mesa, apparently photographed during the same Cyantist trip when the caldera photo was shot. So they must have toured around a bit while here.



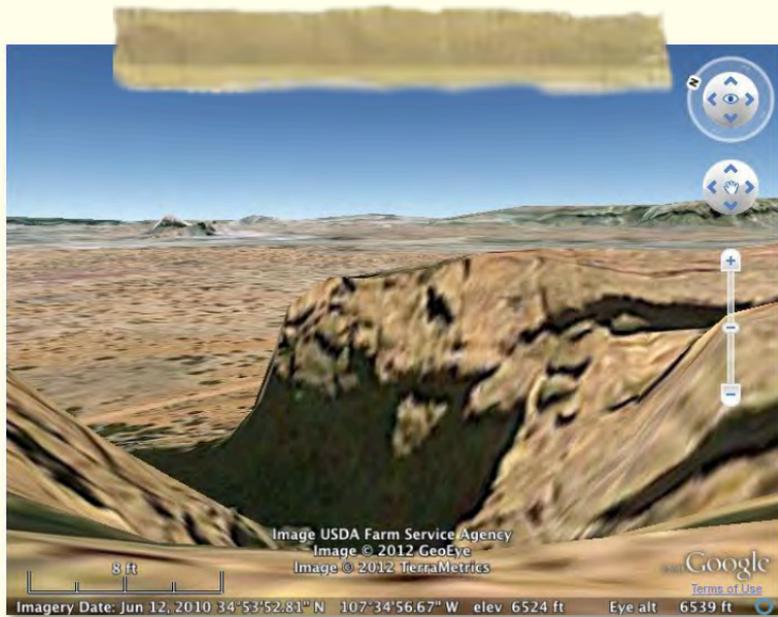
A nameless mesa viewed from another mesa in
New Mexico, from the Prima Guide.

* * * *

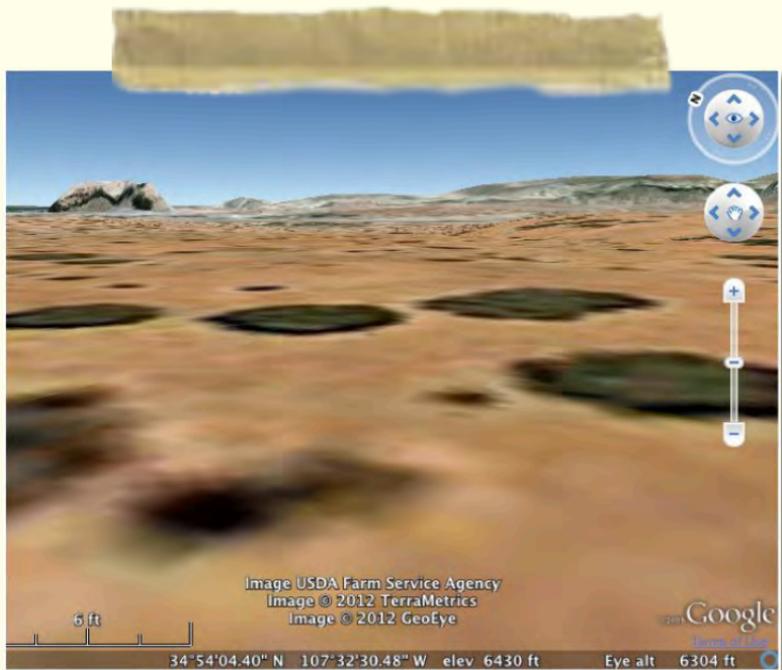
Googled for New Mexico mesa photographs and actually found the namesless mesa! Talk about amazing luck! Or perhaps not, as this particular mesa is one of the most photographed in the state. It's Enchanted Mesa, viewed from Acoma Pueblo. Next stop, Google Earth.

Tuesday 29 May 2012

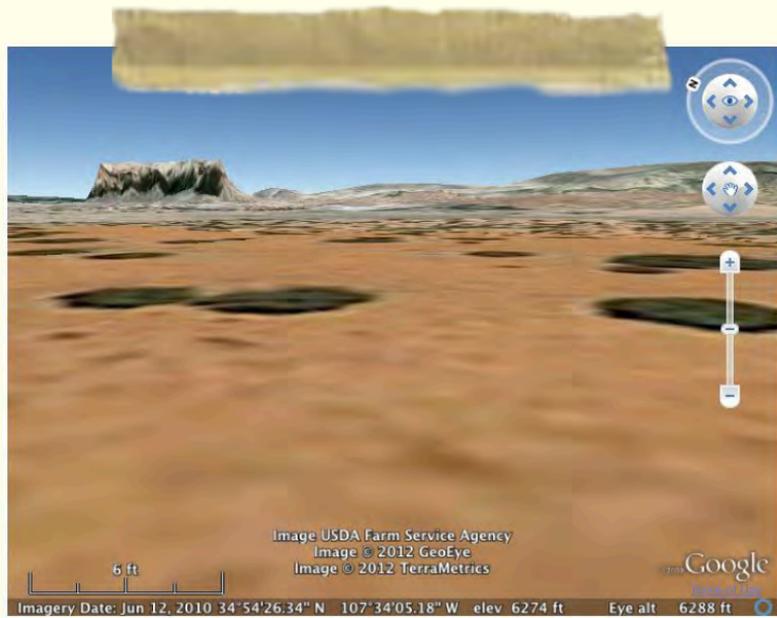
I finally had a chance to spend some serious time with Google Earth and was able to get a series of screenshots of Enchanted Mesa. It provides a good baseline of just how accurate and helpful I can expect this tool to be in my online Cleft location research. Sadly, it will probably be difficult to find a truly recognizable image of the Cleft caldera from Google Earth. Ah well...



The approximate vantage point of the Prima Guide photo, viewed from Acoma Pueblo; the mesa appears misshapen though the horizon line appears very similar to the photo.



Approaching Enchanted Mesa; the mesa shape is looking better.



The overall shape of the mesa is corrected.



Close view of Enchanted Mesa.



A reference photo of Enchanted Mesa, courtesy of Wikipedia; the resemblance can be seen but the Google Earth image is not a dead ringer.

Wednesday 20 Jun 2012

It's been a number of weeks since my last foray with Google Earth so I decided to have another go tonight. This time, I explored the La Bajada mesa area near Santa Fe. Tetilla Peak in particular intrigues me as it also has a distinctive tip. But overall, this area just doesn't look right to me. There are many hills/extinct volcanoes all about, which makes it appear much too crowded to be a serious contender. The DRC photo in particular indicates that the caldera is relatively isolated.

I wandered all over the place there, points east and west, but really didn't find anything worth a road trip. Did the same for Taos with the same results...



Tetilla Peak—the tip here is centered instead of off to one side; and it doesn't have the classic cindercone shape.

Saturday 30 Jun 2012

It's been a while again since I've done anything of note here but I'm determined at least to head out to the Three Sisters volcanoes on the Albuquerque west mesa and see if they are likely candidates. Based on the images I was able to find online earlier, I think not, but it is worth ruling them out at the very least. After all, they are within an easy distance.

Based on all my other tasks and responsibilities, it won't be until the second weekend or so of July before I can count on getting out there. I'll text Kenny and see if he wants to accompany me on walkabout.

* * * *

Heard back from Kenny and its doubtful he'll be available as he will be getting ready that weekend for a long vacation to visit family. Guess I'll plan on flying solo after all.

Friday 13 Jul 2012

It's my Friday off and I've decided to head out to the Three Sisters today. Gotta pack up some food and plenty of water as it promises to be another hot day in the desert (in spite of the start of the monsoon season). But for the life of me, I can't find my travel first-aid kit anywhere. Guess I'll need to grab one in town as I don't want to go hiking about without one.

* * * *

I've arrived at the main visitor center and think I'll see if they have any maps before I start my trek.



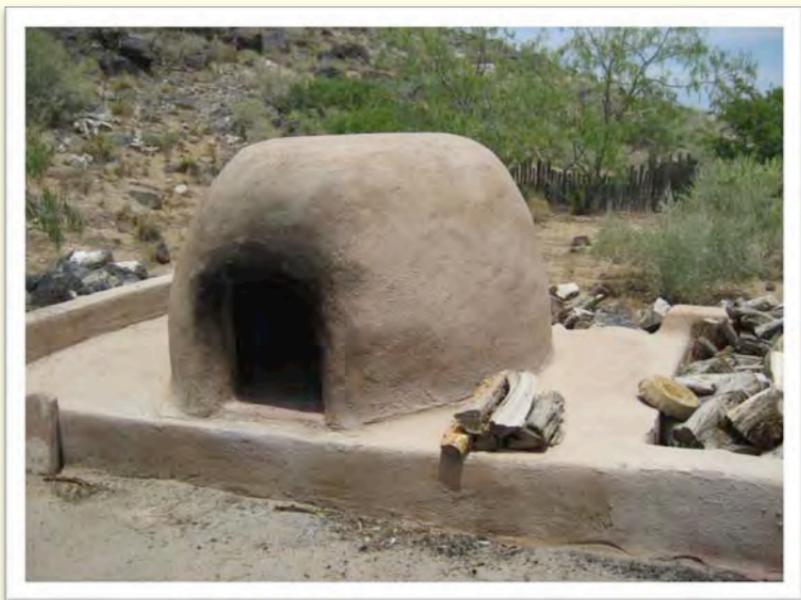
Sign at the trail head.



Visitor center from the parking lot.



Walking up the pathway toward the visitor center.



They have a traditional horno just outside the front door, though I'm not sure what they use it for. Reminds me of the Riven village...



The ramp up to the front door.



Inside-shelves of books and assorted goodies.



Some small storyteller figurines in a display case.

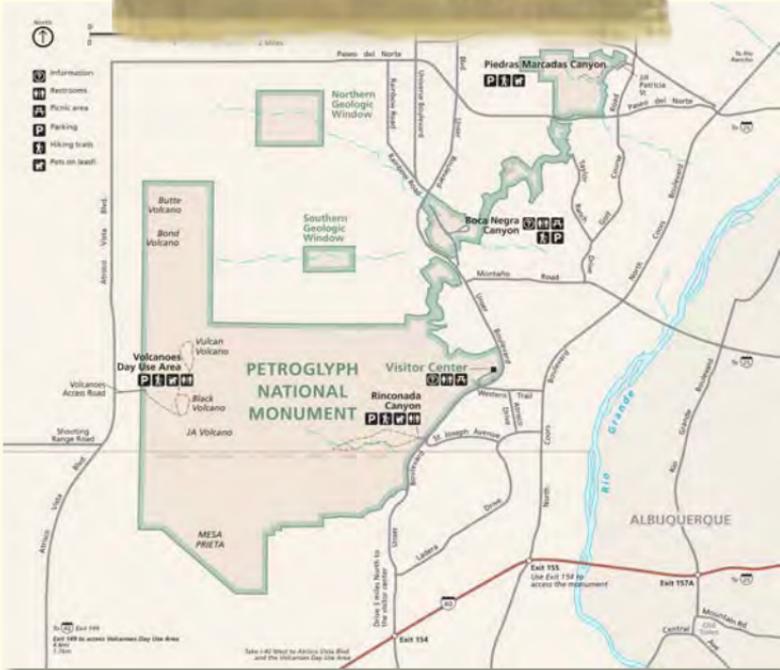


Some ancient arrowheads in another display case, beautifully knapped.

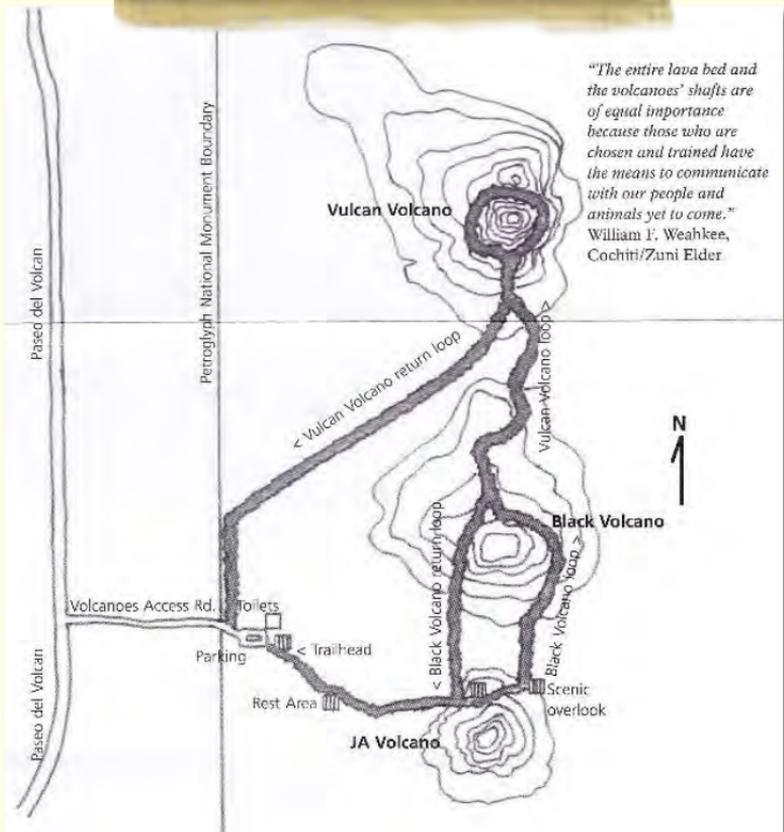
* * * *

They have a couple useful maps. The various archeological sites are widely scattered along the lower mesa edge. Although my primary goal today is to visit and document the volcanoes, I

doubt I'll be able to resist visiting some of the petroglyphs down here along the lower edge. That trip to Three Rivers several years ago and the blatant D'ni images I found there is just too strong a pull for me. Who knows if I'll find something similar here??



Overview of the park boundaries.



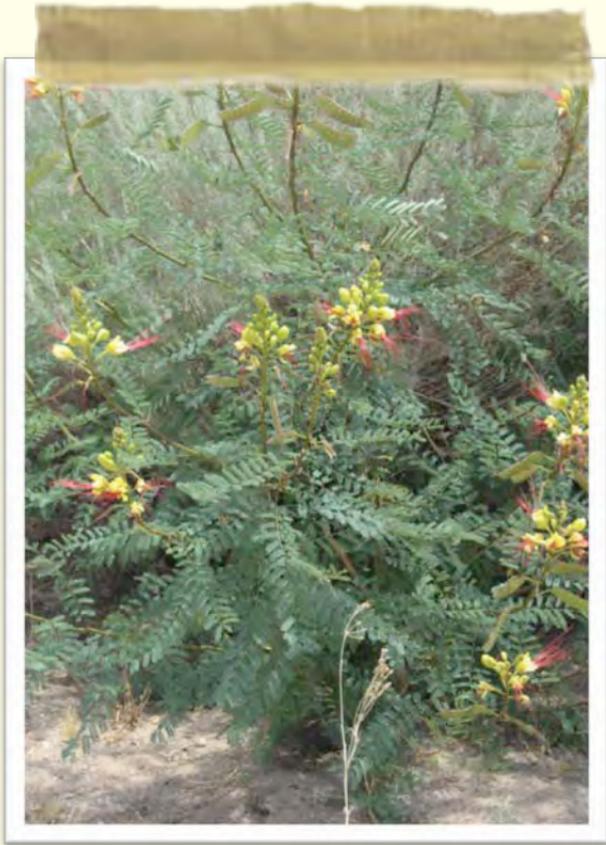
Major footpaths for the Three Sisters, the three southern volcanoes.

Since it's already after lunchtime, I suspect I'll focus more on reconnaissance today.

* * * *

I'm heading up the trailhead here to check out the climb to the top of the volcanic mesa. With my iTunes playing Uru riffs, backpack, sunglasses and Aussie hat, I'm ready to go.

There are large chunks of the black volcanic rock scattered everywhere. And it's a fairly steep climb up to the top. I have to pick my way through the broken lava detritus that forms the downward slope and must be careful of the sharp rock edges; and their black color makes them very hot in the afternoon sun.



*A Desert Bird of Paradise is in full bloom near
the trailhead.*



The black finish on the lava rocks is called desert varnish; but underneath is the tell-tale brown color which is the hallmark of the pecked petroglyphs. The chip in this boulder shows the dramatic difference in color.



It's a steep climb to the top from here.



At the summit, the view of the Sandia Mountains to the east is lovely with its cluster of monsoon season clouds.



Looking to the northwest, the Three Sisters are in the far distance. The Albuquerque suburbs are surprisingly close to the park land.



The mesa surface is varied; here there is volcanic gravel.

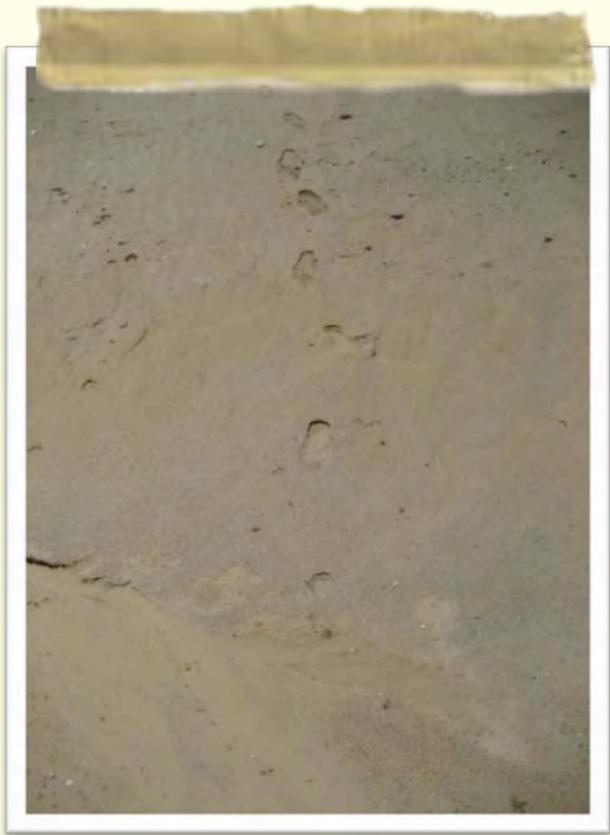


A few steps away, the lava appears more like
cobblestones, reminding me of the Ae'Gura
streets.

* * * *

The volcanoes are much too far to walk from here, so I must drive the road back to the highway and continue west to the access road that will

take me within a reasonable reach. Time to hike
back down to the visitor center parking lot.



I take a different route down and must cross a
sandy wash to reach the parking lot.



There is a small amphitheater here.



A Desert Millipede enjoying the cool shade from
the amphitheater steps.



Next to the amphitheater is a Tibetan or Nepalese shrine. I can see it has received many visits from the faithful who have left gifts upon its steps.

* * * *

I'm back in the parking lot and getting ready to head out toward the volcanoes. I've found my first zoological denizen, so I suppose I will be using my Age survey skills throughout this walkabout.

As I pass by one of the petroglyph road pullouts, I decide to stop by and see if I can't find any Yeeshah or Bahro sign here. (I knew I couldn't resist.)



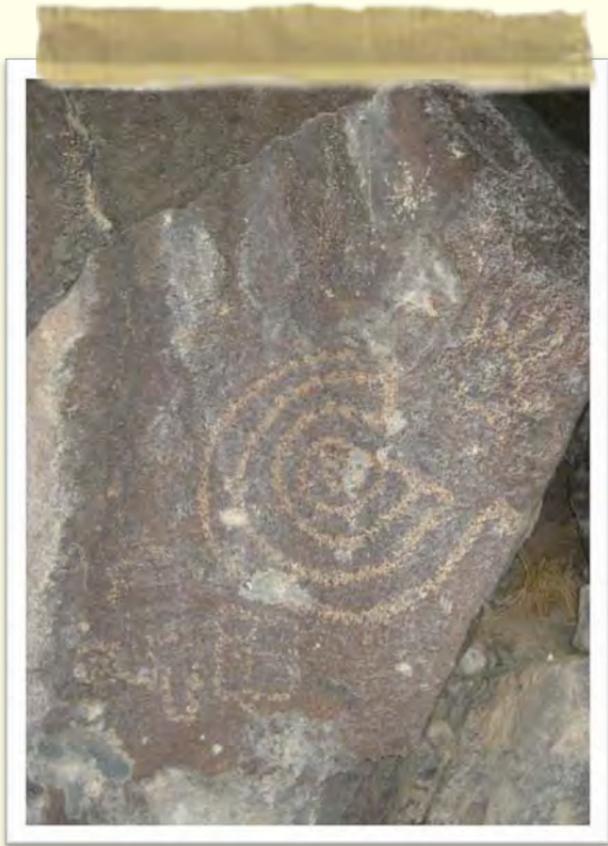
Rinconada means "cornered" in Spanish, so I suppose it must be a reference to the shape of the canyon walls here.



The trailhead; the cliff edges wander about, so the trail likely will do the same.



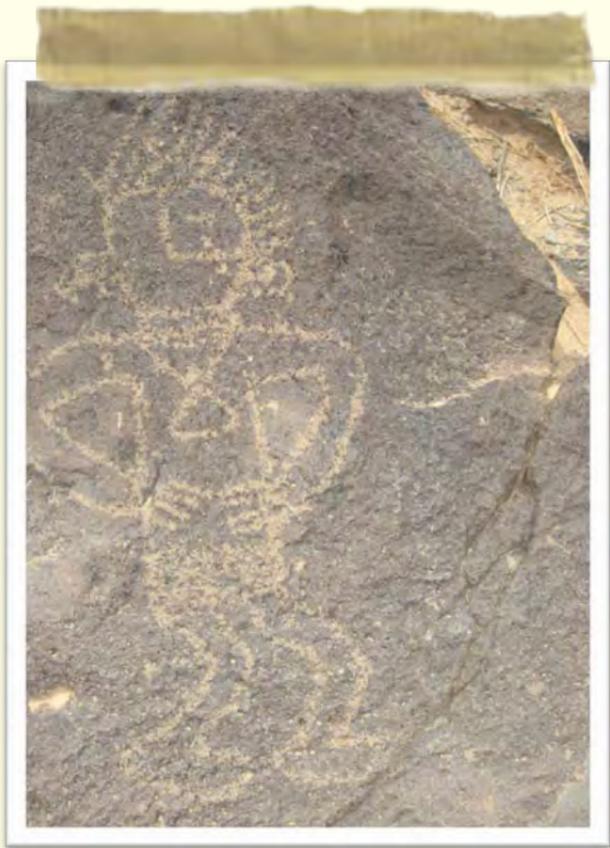
Rather than clustered as at Three Rivers, these petroglyphs are scattered about here and there.



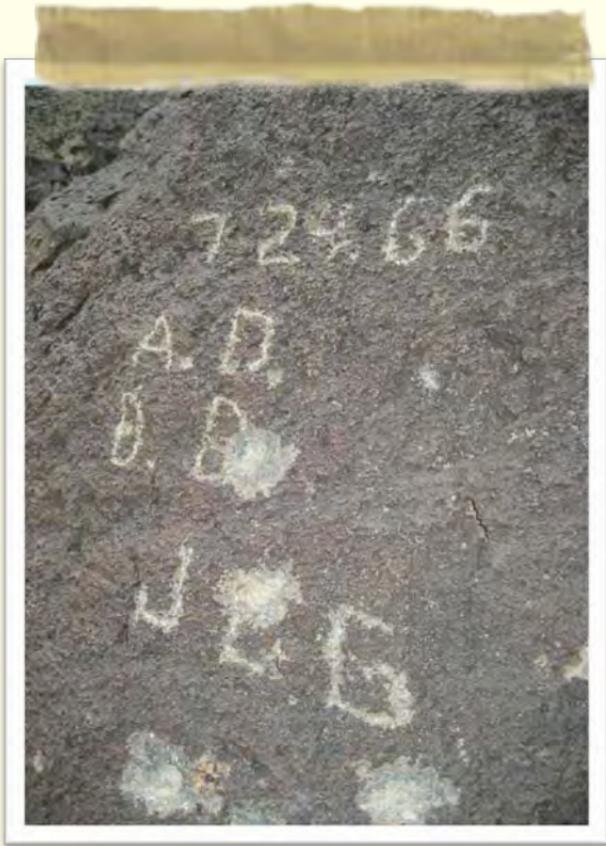
This is an interesting spiral variant, reminding
me of a labyrinth.



There are several snake figures here, though
sadly the top parts of these rocks have since
broken away. There appears to be a remnant of a
lizard figure above the spiral snake, or possibly
an anthropomorph with a lizard tail.



A katchina dancer in full costume.

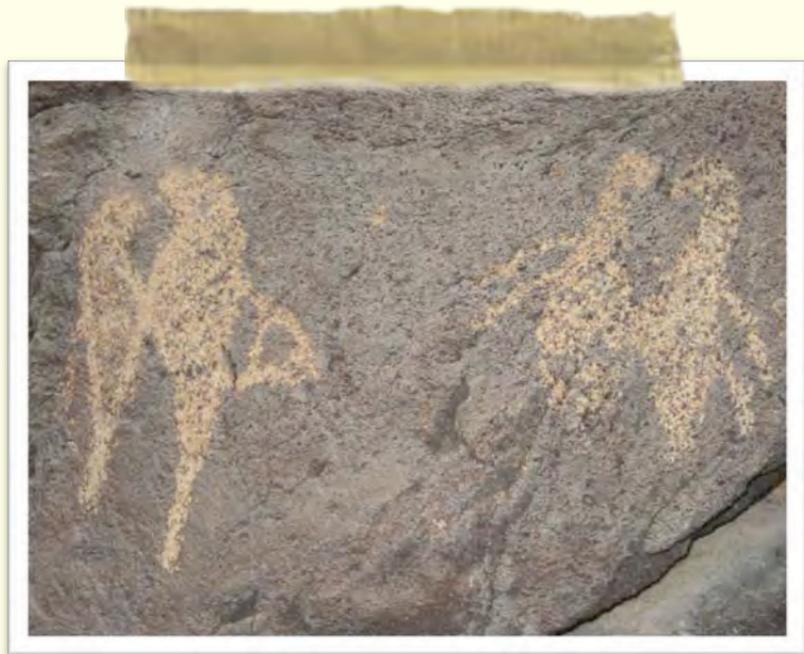


A very recent addition. Such signatures were very common several centuries ago when the Spanish first explored here. They typically would leave their initials, the date and the sign of the Christian cross, sometimes deliberately

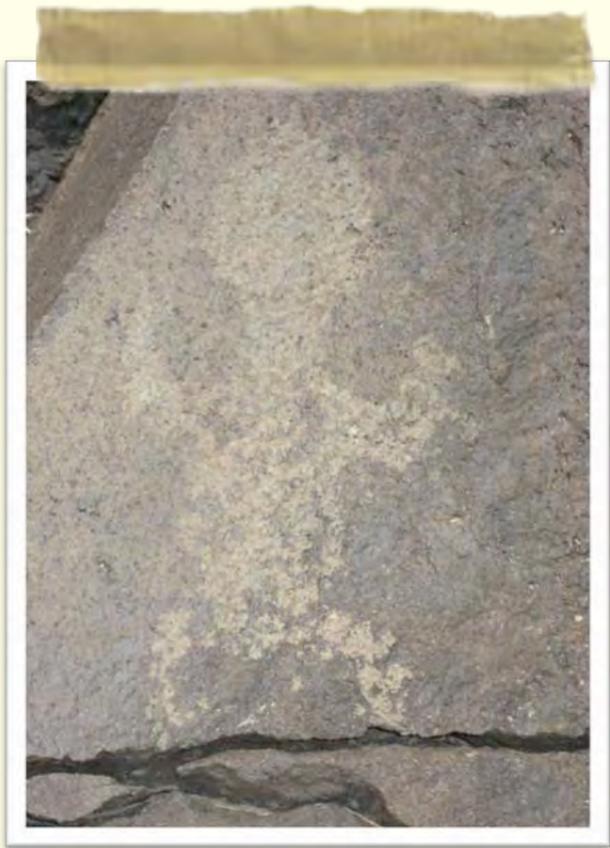
obliterating the native art, considering it
heathen.



Various animal figures.



Paired bird figures, perhaps?



A humanoid figure.



The zia, a puebloan symbol for the sun; and the symbol upon the New Mexico state flag.

* * * *

I'm back at the car after many rest breaks on my way here. Much of the trail was soft sand and so I'm both exhausted and very thirsty. I'm practically inhaling all the water in my spare

canteen and cooling off in front of the air conditioner.

Because the trail was unexpectedly wearing, I only hiked a small portion of the canyon. It was taking longer than expected plus I need to conserve some energy for my main goal. However, I'm not sure how much hiking I'll be able to do at the volcanoes since I'm feeling particularly spent right now. If nothing else, I can continue my reconnaissance and make better plans for another day.

Okay, time to hit the road again.

* * * *

Made it to the parking lot here without incident. I have a few hours to explore before

they lock the gates, so I need to ensure I'm back at the car before 5:00 p.m. At first glance, the trails look solid and easily accessible, so I'm hoping I can leave the backpack behind and just take a full canteen along.



On the way to the access road—makes me ponder if Zandi changed his gate and warning sign...



The Three Sisters—Vulcan, Black and JA
Volcanoes.



The entrance gate.



The trailhead with JA volcano straight ahead.



One of several shaded rest stops on the trail.



There is a shy Say's Phoebe flitting about the roof here. I think it must be a good sign to see a desert bird...



Facing east, approaching JA Volcano.



On the east side of JA Volcano, looking upslope; it is very steep and in spite of the well-trod paths leading to the summit, I am too tired to try the climb. I will have to return again, I think.



Turning around and looking eastward, I can see
the city of Albuquerque and the Sandia
Mountains in the distance.



From farther back and looking westward, the shape of JA is still suggestive but not a true match for the Cleft caldera.



As I finish the circuit of JA Volcano, I find a very late blooming Hedgehog Cactus; most cacti finished their flowering nearly two months ago by now.



Facing north, a view of Black Volcano. Both JA and Black Volcanoes seem too small to be good candidates for the Cleft caldera.



Small piles of volcanic rubble dot the landscape
along the path.



On the east side of Black volcano looking
upslope; no resemblance to the Cleft caldera in
this view.



A rather alien-looking plant in the pathway,
called Mormon Tea. I nudge it with my shoe and
sure enough, it is firmly rooted and very much
alive and well.



Stopping for a brief rest and water break, I notice a tiny green sprout amidst the dried grasses—a small sign of life in the dry earth.



Moving past Black Volcano, Vulcan Volcano can be seen ahead in the distance. It is much bigger and looks more rugged than the others.



A wildflower along the path, a Silverleaf
Nightshade.



Another odd-looking plant along the path,
another form of Mormon Tea I think.



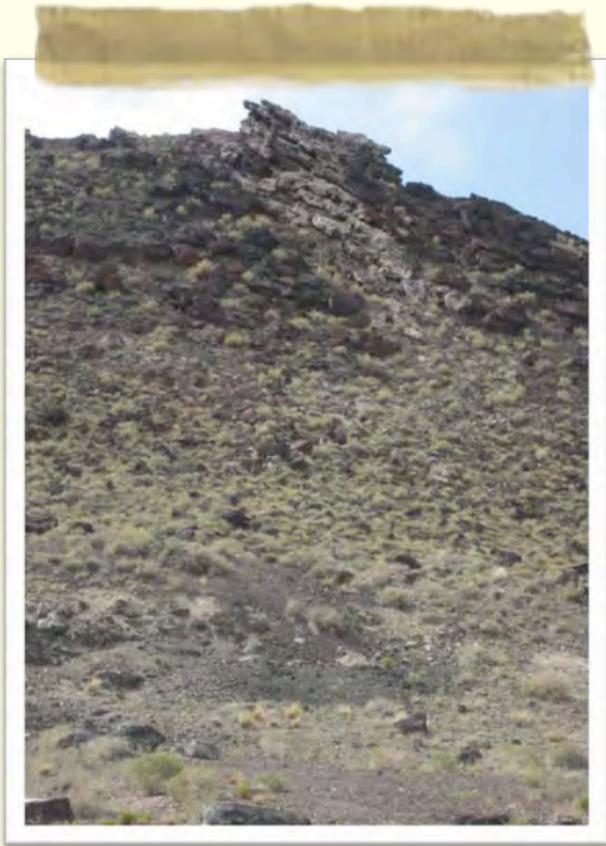
More flora; an Annual Bursage and an
unidentified dead broadleaf plant. There are
many of these dried brown husks along the way.



Approaching the base of Vulcan Volcano, there is a large open pit to the left.



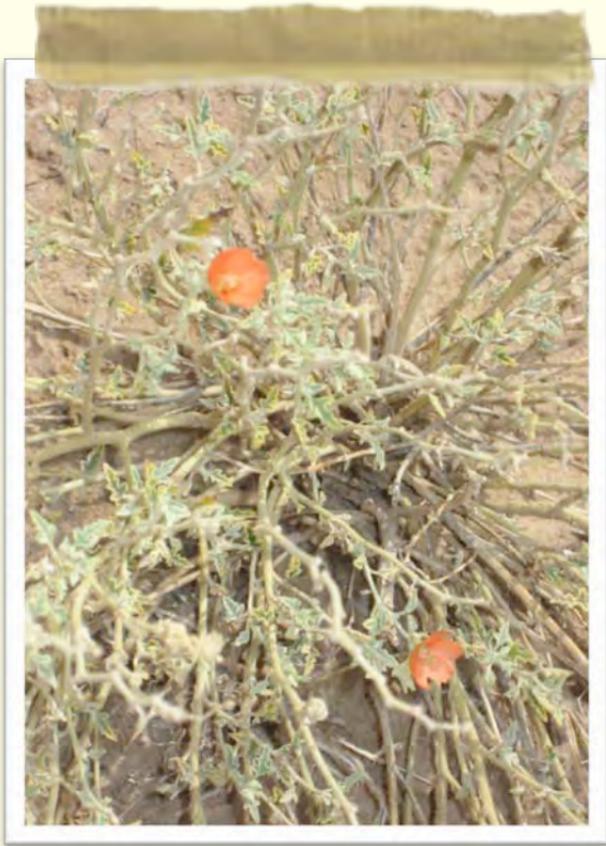
Standing near the edge of the pit, it's hard to tell if it was naturally formed; I think of young Atrus and his battery experiment gone awry at the Cleft.



The volcanic crags uphill look different here, almost as though they are layered, rather like a leaning hogback ridge. It's too late to attempt a full circuit of Vulcan Volcano, so I must head for the return trail.



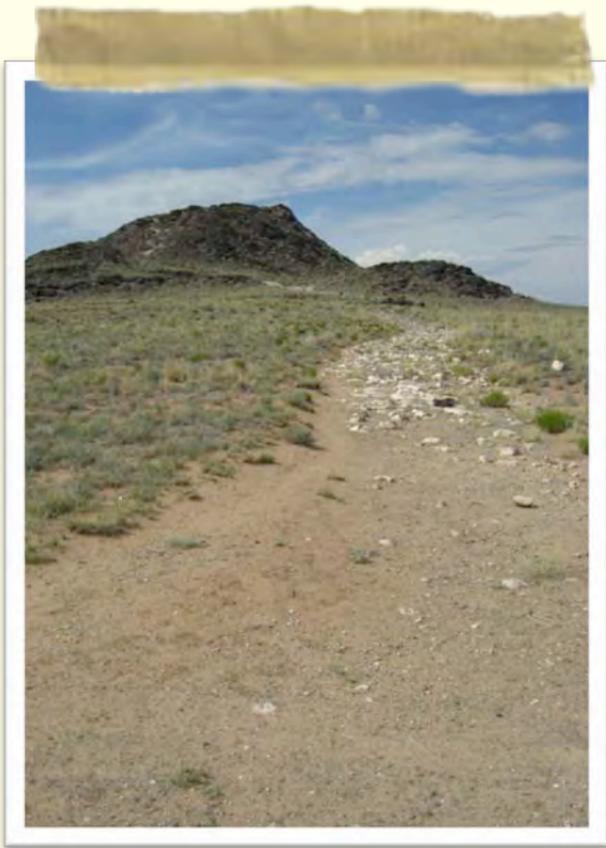
There are signs of earlier human habitation, so perhaps the Vulcan pit was man-made.



Along the western path leading back to the parking lot, I find an Orange Globe Mallow.



And right next to the Globe Mallow is a little
Threadleaf Groundsel.



As I look back, I regret not having enough time to explore Vulcan Volcano. I really must return when I'm rested and have a full day to spend here.



There is a small dead beetle in the path; he is a beautiful iridescent green.



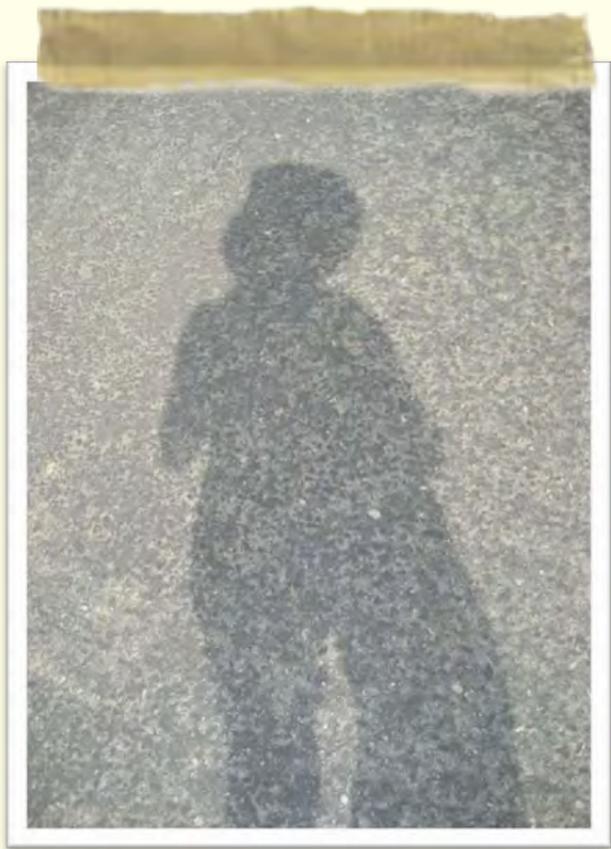
Farther along is another Threadleaf Groundsel
gone to seed.



I am startled to see a rosy lizard ahead; I have never seen such an animal in New Mexico before. I later learn that he is a Dunes Sagebrush Lizard.



From the parking lot, a final view of the two
nearest Sisters, Black Volcano and JA
Volcano.



Before climbing into my car, I take this photo of my shadow.

* * * *

Back in the car, I finish off my water supply and ponder for a bit. I have time to spare before the entry gates will be locked for the day and am grateful I was able to make the trek around the Three Sisters after all.

Even though none of the Sisters bears a close enough resemblance to the Cleft caldera photos, I continue to be intrigued by Vulcan Volcano. It feels... suggestive and enigmatic. I must come back again and explore it more thoroughly. I especially want to climb its summit and down into the pit.

It's time to head home for refreshment, a shower and some rest. I think about my day's journey during the entire drive down from the

mesa into the Albuquerque Rio Grande basin
and out past the Sandia Mountains.

Back at home, cats are eager to be fed and I
must attend to various chores before I can
finish my day, wash up and get some sleep. But
I am out for the count as soon as my head
touches the pillow.

Saturday 14 Jul 2012

Good lord, I'm tired!! I've turned a nice amber-pink from yesterday's walkabout and I'm sore just about everywhere plus dog-tired in spite of a good night's rest. That hike through the sand really did me in, I guess.

* * * *

Updating this journal was not among the chores on my agenda last evening after I got home, so I've worked on it all day today. The journal is already nearly full, so I suppose I will have to start another in the near future. But perhaps I can squeeze in a follow-up visit to the Sisters first...

Sunday 15 Jul 2012

I'm feeling much better today. Just need to finish up the plant identification so I can post my results on the MOULA forums and publish my current journal. Sure would be nice to find an app to identify the flora and fauna here but so far, I haven't found anything. Guess I'll need to see about finding some old-fashioned nature guide books.

Monday 16 Jul 2012

Just before ending my day, I re-checked the iTunes app store again. Guess it makes a big difference what you search for 'cause this time, I found a very nice collection of Audobon nature guides. I purchased the southwestern U.S. one in a heartbeat. I'm very pleased!! Now I'm ready for my trip back to the Sisters.

Friday 27 Jul 2012

Another Friday off and I'm heading out to the Sisters again. The plan is to focus on Vulcan and see if I can't understand its enigmatic nature better.

Though this isn't exactly related to my Cleft search (since I already saw quite plainly that none of the Sisters could be the Cleft caldera), it feels very much like unfinished business.

* * * *

Once again, I didn't arrive until after lunch time. But since I have a more compact agenda today, I'm hoping that three hours will be plenty of time.

I'm starting my trek by hiking directly to Vulcan. It's a lovely day, bright and breezy with plenty of monsoon clouds everywhere in the blue sky. I'm seeing lots of botanical specimens everywhere, so will be making frequent stops on my way in to supplement my last trip's records.



A shadowy Vulcan is ahead in the distance.



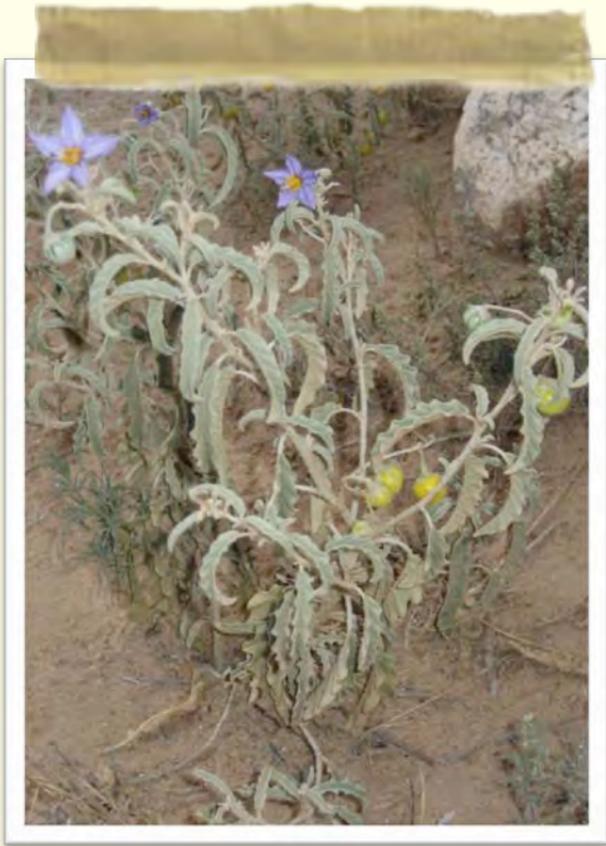
Looking to the west, Mount Taylor is in the far distance.



To the east, the Sandia Mountains are dappled
in sunshine and cloud shadow.



Walking the path toward Vulcan, there is plenty of thriving Snakeweed; it appears there has been a good rain here since my last visit.



A Silverleaf Nightshade gone to fruit; they are very common all along the pathway.



An old Darkling Beetle shell on the side of the path.



A very busy Black Ant colony in the middle of the path.



A Little Striped Whiptail Lizard; they are very active today but very skittish. I am lucky to capture a photo at all.



An interesting Four-wing Saltbush.



An low-growing plant, possibly a Geranium species.



There are several clusters of these charming
Shrubby Cinquefoils.



A group of rabbit warrens. Since I do not see any rabbits about, it's difficult to say whether these are Jackrabbit or Cottontail; however the size of the holes favors the Jackrabbit.



I have arrived at the foot of Vulcan. Ahead is
the trail leading up to its summit.



As I begin the ascent, I find a solitary Mexican
Manzanita.



A creeping Goathead plant; they form
pernicious ball-like thorned seeds.



About one-third of the climb up slope, there is a short natural arch. It is too small for me to squeeze through while wearing my backpack.



About three-quarters up slope, I can see the long hogback-like slabs I noticed in my earlier trip.



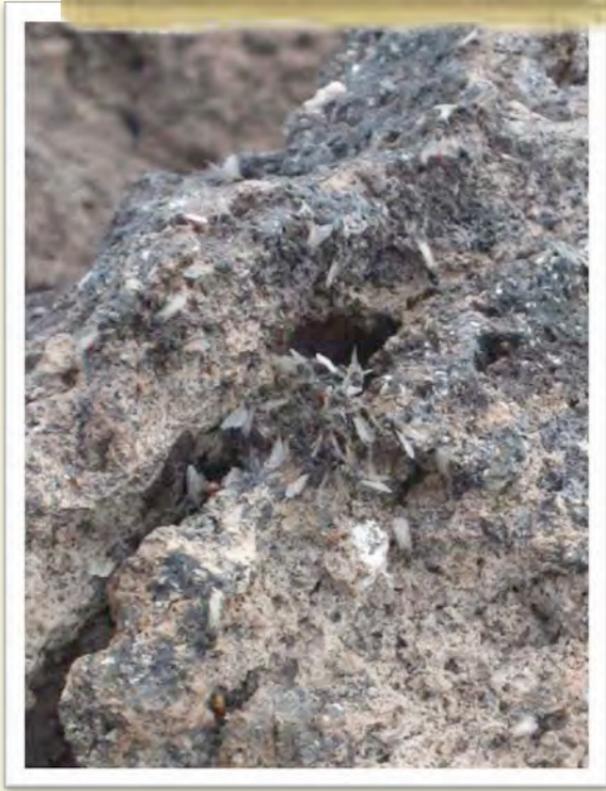
Nearby, there is a much larger natural arch. I
can sit underneath it quite easily.



The rock is extremely rugged here at the summit.



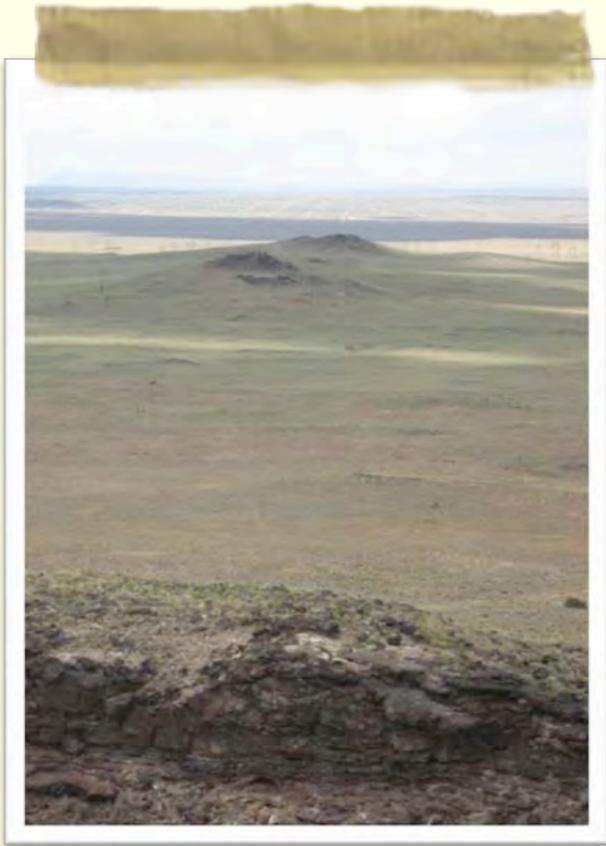
At the very top, I sit down for a breather and see an old sign of human presence—cement and a sawn-off piece of rebar, likely from the days before this area became a protected monument.



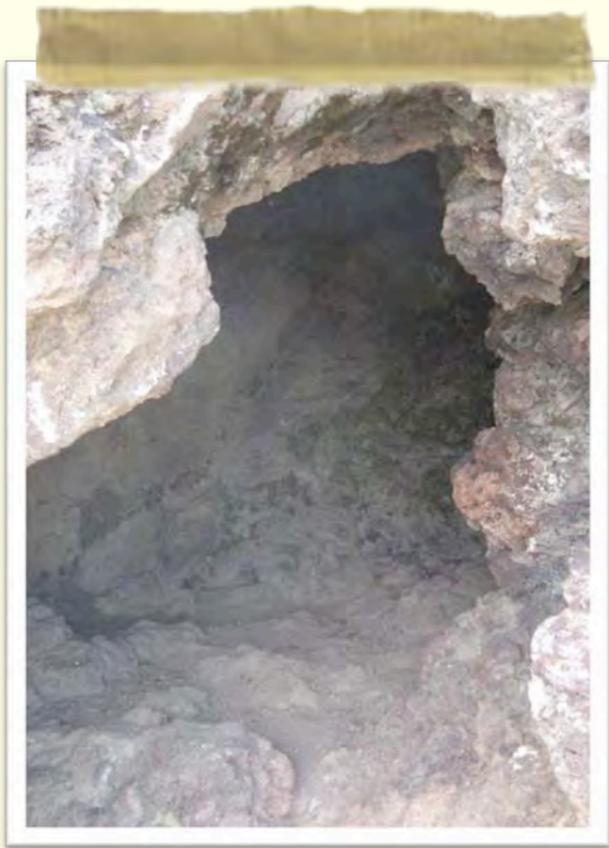
There is a thriving colony of Winged Ants here
at the summit; I must be careful where I sit
and do not stay long.



The view from the summit is awesome! I am facing the southeast and the Manzano Mountains.



Looking north from the summit, the two small
cousins to the Sisters can be seen.



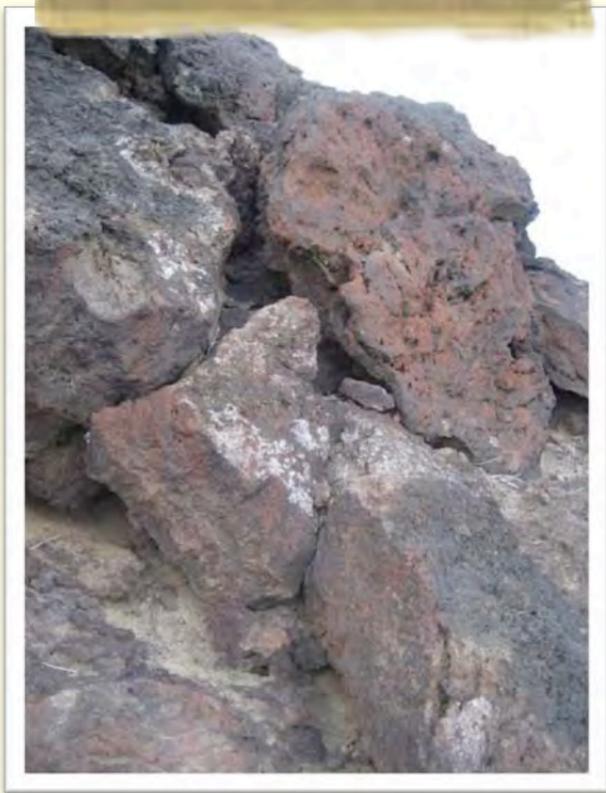
As I begin climbing down the east-facing slope,
I come upon a small cave.



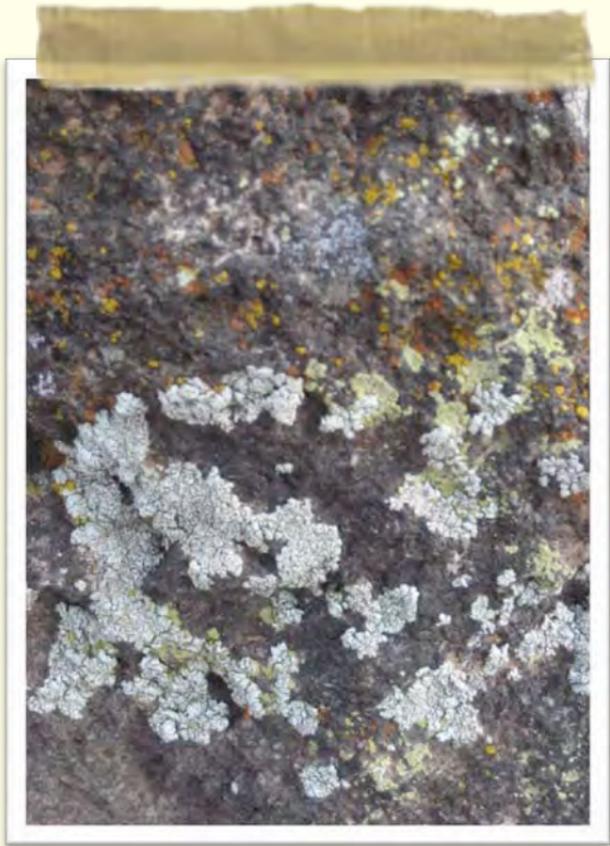
I can climb inside easily and am surprised to find patches of dry moss growing.



There is a wide variety of color to the rock in here.



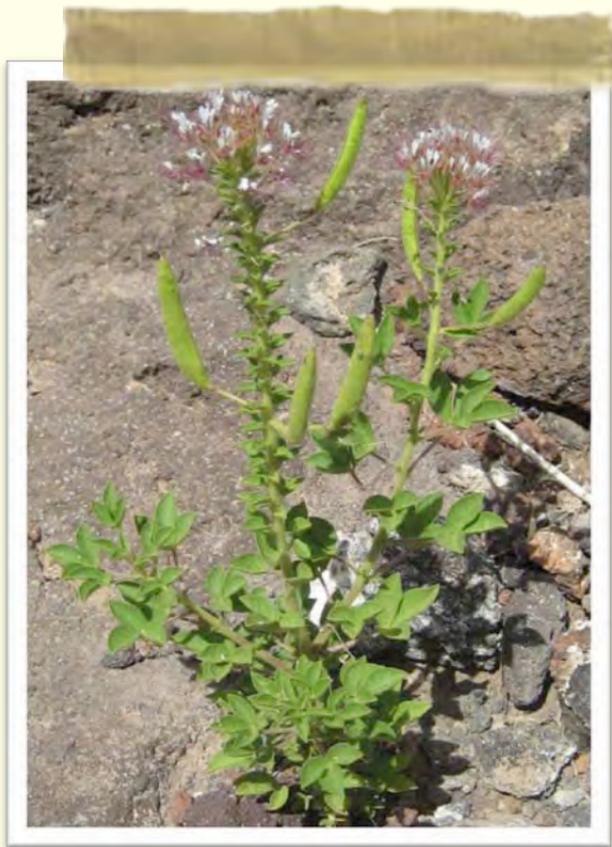
There is an unexpected variety of color on this slope; the southwestern slope where I ascended was the typical black.



Many rocks are covered with lichen; there are at least four varieties on this one.



A bit farther down slope, I come upon some
purple rock.



A thriving Red-whisker Clammyweed on the
down slope.



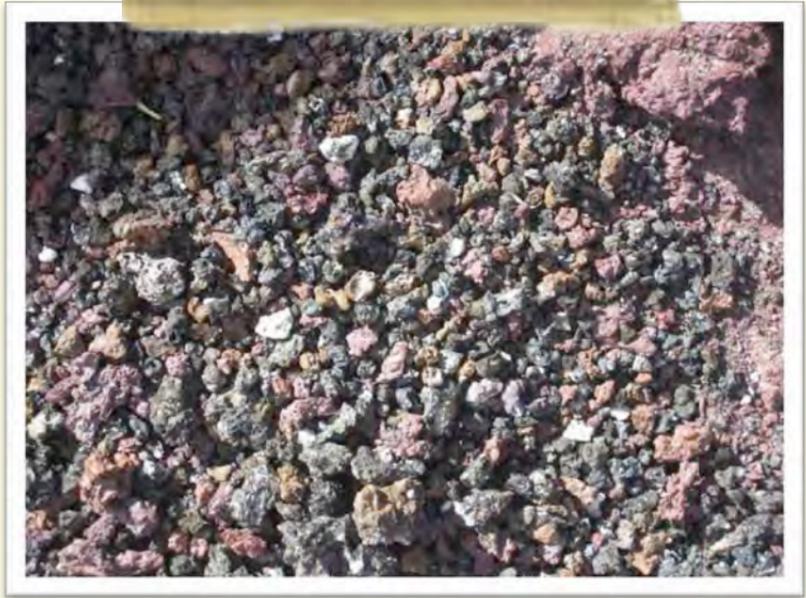
A Prickly Pear Cactus beginning to fruit.



Looking down into the old pit from the volcano-
side edge.



I make my way into the old pit and disturb a
Say's Phoebe who flits about a bit before leaving
for a more private location.



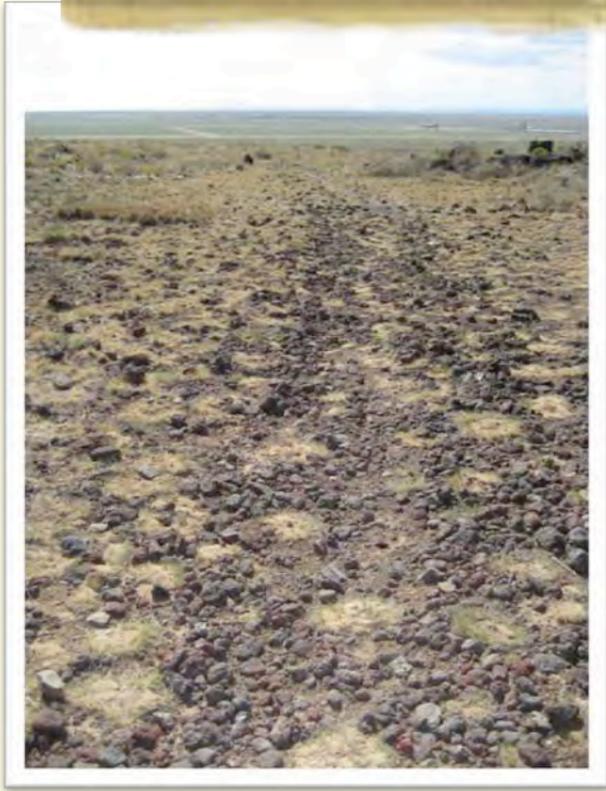
The natural gravel here in the pit is very colorful and makes for unsteady footing; I must be careful as I walk about the upslope perimeter.



Someone has left a rocky love declaration just
outside the pit.



As I continue my circuit of the Vulcan base, I
find old evidence of target practice in the gravel.



Upslope again partway, there is a path through one of the craggy outlying bits of Vulcan. The path is dotted with round rings of clumped grass.



A Giant Robber Fly along the return path.



A bit farther ahead and blending in nicely with the dirt path is a Palid Winged Grasshopper.



A lonely wild Prairie Sunflower.



Coyote scat at the side of the path, the only sign I have seen of these animals here. Since they are largely nocturnal, this is not surprising.



I am surprised to see a Dunes Sagebrush Lizard at the same location I found one last time; I wonder if he is the same fellow. Today, I can see him much more clearly.



As I near the parking lot, there is another
Say's Phoebe flitting about nearby.



On the roadside as I drive back toward the freeway, I find a solitary but thriving cluster of Phlox.

It has been another tiring excursion, but I am not nearly so spent as I'd become two weeks ago. The hike to the summit was more challenging than I had expected. High altitude climbing is more difficult than all the clambering about I do in the D'ni Ages...

Vulcan has shown the fiery violence of the distant past here with its still-sharp crags and rough textures throughout. The colors of the rock are surprising and fiery as well, ranging from the dominant dark black to reds and oranges and even purples. I can only imagine the forces that created this feature and its colorful palette...

Although the Sisters and their cousins are not candidates for the Cleft caldera, this part of New Mexico is extremely promising, with the

wide vistas and open scrubland. It has the same look and feel as the Cleft and I can't shake that sense of familiarity as I hike about here. My thoughts keep turning westward, toward Acoma Pueblo and the enigmatic photograph taken there of Enchanted Mesa. And I continue wondering about the Taos area, with its wide volcanic plains, the lower dip of the San Luis Valley, and the deep location of the Rio Grande river...

Perhaps the Rio Grande feeds the Cavern lake? Or perhaps the Cavern lake drains slowly into the Rio Grande there? Though the Rio Grande runs deep up north, it is nothing close to three miles down from the mesa surface, though it's well known that the river itself runs largely underground...

More research is called for. And this volume is now close to bursting with all my photos. Time to begin a new journal.

Monday Jul 30, 2012

I have been working on plant and animal identification, which once again is slow going. The little app I bought is useful but the database is sadly limited. So far, I'm finding fewer than half of my found specimens listed there.

There are a number of good online sites for researching such things, though some of them are challenging to search. I will keep plugging away at this and hope to have things settled by the end of the week. I would like to update the forum thread with the latest news, though quite honestly it appears that interest there has faded.



