Spring Breakers from San Antonio Team up with SRSU Geology Club

By Kevin W. Pang (The Ranger/San Antonio College) and Logan Gordon (Sul Ross State University), excerpted

For many students, Spring Break connotes a journey to South Padre Island. For the San Antonio College’s student Geological Society and the Sul Ross State University Geology Club, it meant a trip to Big Bend National Park. The Chihuahuan desert, located in southwest Texas and north central Mexico, is larger than the state of Rhode Island.

The trip began in San Antonio, where 12 San Antonio College students, a reporter, College faculty and a photographer, loaded gear into two vans and embarked upon the seven-hour drive to Sul Ross.

So just how is it that San Antonio College students decided to spend their Spring Break in Big Bend to learn about Texas Geology?

The story goes that Logan Gordon, Sul Ross Geology Club secretary met some San Antonio College Geology Club members at a meeting in San Antonio sponsored by Adelante Tejas to increase participation enrollment, retention, transfer and graduation in the sciences at both schools. Gordon was allegedly making claims that “West Texas and Sul Ross are the greatest place to study geology because there’s every type of rock: sedimentary, metamorphic and volcanic” or something in that vein. She went bolder: “In fact, all you have to do is walk outside (in Alpine) and you can see mountains.”

Mountains? In Texas? The San Antonio College students wisely insisted that she prove it and a plan to take a joint field trip to Big Bend National Park was quickly hatched.

The San Antonio group spent the first night in the Lobo Village dorm rooms. On Saturday morning early, the San Antonio College students met with seven members of the Sul Ross Geology Club and a four-vehicle caravan proceed South to Big Bend National Park: Destination Cottonwood Campground. The group took Ross Maxwell Drive to Sotol Vista, a scenic overlook of Santa Elena Canyon and Tuff Canyon in Big Bend National Park.

Upon arriving at the Lower Burro Mesa Pour-off, the students drank water, and snacked on bananas and wraps before setting out for what geologists do often: Hiking.

The trail began in sandy terrain, changing to rocky terrain over the course of three-quarters of a mile. Within the pour-off, two students did what geologists also do: They scaled a 40-foot-deep channel formed by erosion and composed of a volcanic surge deposit, just to see the formation up close. The formation contains gas escape tubes, called maars, which formed when the flow came into contact with ground water.

Gordon described the differentiating sizes of the crystals in the channel that were formed as the magma cooled. Just to be sure everyone noticed, she also pointed out the mountains.

The group also visited Tuff Canyon. Hiking through the canyon, Gordon explained that Tuff “is consolidated ash deposited by a volcanic, pyroclastic eruption. It is easily eroded and therefore a canyon has formed in this particular spot.”

The evening’s entertainment was six hours of star gazing into the night sky. The next morning, at Santa Elena Canyon where the Rio Grande runs between 1,500 feet cliffs, students and advisers scaled boulders and studied the thick layers of limestone near the river on the U.S. side.

That afternoon, students hiked the Window Trail in the Chisos Basin and spent the final evening together at the rocky campsite otherwise known as “the Boathouse Bar and Campground” in Terlingua where the visiting students learned about the mining history of The Terlingua District.
SRSU Continues to Expand as a Leader in Science

Sul Ross State University students and faculty made seven scientific presentations at the annual Texas Academy of Science meeting at Schreiner University, Kerrville. Sul Ross presentations were:

- “An annotated vascular flora of The Nature Conservancy Preserve of the Davis Mountains, Jeff Davis County, Texas” by J. James Keeling, Alpine.
- “Variations in mescaline concentrations in the crown, subterranean stem, and root of Lophophora williamsii (Peyote) and ethnobotanical implications” by Molly Klein, Alpine; Dr. M. Kalam, and Dr. Martin Terry.
- “A geochemical and microbial diversity survey of a natural iron seep within Big Bend Ranch State Park” by Julia Green, Alpine; and Jackie Denson.
- “An analysis of the distribution and diversity of Thaumarchaeota within the springs and soils of the northwestern Chihuahuan Desert” by Laura Tang, Westminster, Cal.; and Jackie Denson.
- “Status of the tamarisk leaf beetle (Diorhabda spp.) as a saltcedar (Tamarix) biocontrol agent along the Rio Grande River in Presidio County and its impact on a non-target species, Tamarisk aphylla” by Anne Marie Hilscher, Alpine; and Dr. Christopher M. Ritzi.
- “Influence of fire on and succession of microbial communities after disturbance in Marfa grasslands” by Masahiro Ohnishi, Alpine; Dr. Bonnie Warnock, Jackie Denson, and Dr. Louis Harveson.

Women-in-Art Class Travels

The Sul Ross Art Club and the class, Women in Art, took an early Spring Break vacation to the city of Santa Fe, New Mexico. Eight Sul Ross students (Mariaha Williams, Leinora Alimboyoguen, Shelby Rogers, Olivia Gallegos, Judith Loya, Alexander Costa, Brent Bandli) and professor Ellie Meyers Madrid enjoyed the unique cultural art scene at this historic city. The trip itinerary included: In the wake of Juárez, the drawings of Alice Leora Briggs at the University of New Mexico Art Museum; Woven and Stitched by Judy Chicago at the David Richard Gallery; the Georgia O’Keeffe Museum, and various art galleries on the famous Canyon Road. Photo by Brenda Gallegos

ANRS Sponsors Lectures on Ecology and Horse Fever

The 19th SALE Leaders in Agriculture Lecture featured Dr. Fred Smeins from Texas A&M University. The title of his presentation was “Natural Resources & Agriculture: Current Issues, Future Prospects & Ecological Constraints.”

Dr. Sharon Spier, DVM, PhD, from the UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine also gave a lecture on “Corynebacterium pseudotuberculosis infection (“Pigeon Fever”): A re-emerging disease in Texas horses.”
Gwen Sullivan, SRSU Data Tracking Specialist, recently formed a walking group called “I Walk Big Bend” (look for it on Facebook). The goal is to get some exercise and fresh air while visiting with co-workers, friends, and the community.

Chuy Spencer created a +/-2 mile course that takes advantage of every beautiful viewing point on campus. Join them every Tuesday and Thursday at 5:15 pm at the fountain on the mall, returning to the fountain at about 6pm. Hikers are invited to invite someone else and come, even if they only have 15 minutes, which will still give everyone a nice workout.

Graduate student, Jeff Keeling’s, General Botany lab tours the campus identifying trees like this Arizona cypress.

Former SRSU professor in Burma

Dr. Steve Platt, former Sul Ross State University Biology professor, stands atop Mount Saramati, at 12,600 feet, the highest point in western Burma. Platt, a Southeast Asia Regional herpetologist, is conducting research in Southeast Asia for the Wildlife Conservation Society. According to Platt, “We are now back in Yangon after almost two months in the field. We spent most of our time on the upper Chindwin River and walking through the Naga Hills. While in the Naga Hills we hiked up Mount Saramati, at 12,600 feet, the highest point in western Burma. No doubt about it, getting to the summit ranks high among my achievements. It took us 13 days of walking to reach the summit and get back. We started at about 550 feet and it took over a week to reach 4500 feet. The following day we climbed to 9300 feet and established a base camp. The nights were near freezing at that elevation. From there we walked to the summit along trails that are trails in name only - more like livestock paths. The pucker factor was really high in places with the trail threading along narrow ledges. Once at the summit I had myself photographed in an SRSU T-shirt as promised.” (Photo Courtesy Dr. Steve Platt)

Closed since 911, Boquillas has reopened. The Skyline sponsor, Cheryl Zinsmyer, traveled to the historic reopening in Big Bend National Park to record the event.

Prior to closing, visitors could ride across the river in a wooden boat, then pay $1 each to ride a burro or horse into the rustic settlement that sports a cantina, restaurant and store. A trip to Boquillas was an experience tourists and locals could find nowhere else, and the town’s economy suffered greatly after the crossing was closed. Many SRSU and local residents fought hard for its reopening.

The crossing is open from 9-6, Wednesday through Sunday. Run by BBNP, visitors must have a valid passport.
Mythbusting

Skyline Editor

Angela Greenroy, editor of the SRSU student newspaper looked into the “law” about Texas bluebonnets and found that it is NOT illegal to pick the state flower.

She says TDPS issued a news release in 2002 stating, “Is it really illegal to pick bluebonnets? The answer is no—there is no law against picking our State Flower. However, there are laws against criminal trespass so make sure you’re not on private property when you stop to take your annual kids-in-the-bluebonnets photo.”

TDOS cautions, however, that there are laws about destroying government property, destroying rights-of-way, and impeding traffic. Photo by Greenroy.

Summer Session 1, SRSU will be offering a new course in Anthropology with excavation of an 11,000 year old Native American campsite. Hosted by the Center for Big Bend Studies, the course includes six credit hours. For more information: Here is a link to the field school website: http://ww2.sulross.edu/cbbs/fieldschool-2013.php
Here is a link to the field school poster in PDF format: http://ww2.sulross.edu/cbbs/docs/2013-fieldschool-poster.pdf
Here is a link to the GLD activities page on the CBBS website: http://ww2.sulross.edu/cbbs/rsch_lykesDuncan.php
Or contact Samuel Cason scason@sulross.edu for more information.
The Rio Grande Research Center and Dr. Kevin Urbanczyk provided a workshop on campus GIS called “Mapping and the Cloud: Campus GIS” in March at the Wildenthal Library Room 201. A boxed lunch from Aramark was provided. This event was sponsored by Adelante Tejas and the Department of Education.

During the workshop Urbanczyk and undergraduate student, Kitty Siboyan, demonstrated how data can be used to develop a campus Geographic Information System using the Sul Ross State University campus as a model. They also instructed participants in where to locate and use mapping resources and tools that are increasingly (and freely) available in “the cloud.” The session was very useful for faculty, staff and students who want to be able to use and create maps of their own to represent geographically referenced information.

Sul Ross State University’s new scanning electron microscope (SEM) is expected to enhance research capacity in the physical and natural sciences.

The microscope, along with lab upgrades exceeding $500,000 are being provided through Adelante Tejas (Forward Texas): A Partnership to Improve STEM Education with San Antonio College. The project is 100 percent funded through a Department of Education award. The ultimate goal of Adelante Tejas is to increase enrollment, progress and graduation in the sciences.

“A student attending a larger school probably wouldn’t get close to a SEM as an undergrad,” said Dr. Kevin Urbanczyk, director of the Rio Grande Research Center. “That experience would be reserved for graduate and post-doctoral candidates and their supervising faculty,”

“The bottom line is: Sul Ross will produce graduates with knowledge of analytical methods and specific, sought-after expertise, enabling them to be academically and professionally competitive candidates for future careers,” Urbanczyk said.
Undergrad Wildlife Student Publishes Article on Pronghorn Research

Daniel Tidwell, SRSU senior majoring in NRM and a McNAir Fellow, has published an article in the March edition of Texas Wildlife. Co-authors on the article were SRSU graduate student and research assistant, Justin Hoffman, and Dr. Louis Harveson, professor and Director of the Borderlands Research Institute. According to Tidwell, he and Harveson and several other NRM students are working on a new handbook for managing pronghorn in the Trans-Pecos. SRSU provides an excellent opportunity for hands-on research opportunities for both graduate and undergraduate students.

Use of Artificial Water by Translocated Pronghorn in Trans-Pecos

Pronghorn antelope populations in the Trans-Pecos region of Texas have declined in recent years, and in 2011, their numbers had declined by 70%. This led to the introduction of artificial water sources to supplement the declining population. In the article, the authors introduce the concept of using artificial water sources to attract and maintain pronghorn populations. The purpose of the study was to evaluate the feasibility of using artificial water sources to sustain pronghorn populations in the Trans-Pecos region.

Students Ask for Outdoor Hoops

Student Support Services continues to try to provide more entertainment for the students of Sul Ross State University and Alpine residents. Their latest project is a plan to construct an outdoor basketball court on campus.

Liz Castillo, Director of Student Support Services, presented the idea of an outdoor basketball court at a recent Student Government Association meeting. Almost immediately she had 22 groups jump on board to help support the project.

Unusual Sighting of Funnel Cloud near Alpine during Recent Rain and Hail

The Skyline photo
Sul Ross’s Outdoorsy Folks Rock and Roll and Trip

Hands-on Wild Life Management

Dr. Louis Harveson, Borderlands Research Institute director and Sul Ross professor of Natural Resource Management, continues to bring in wildlife research opportunities for undergraduates and graduates.

Students and Roman Follow the Bard

Professor Dona Roman bravely led students on a trip to England. Students spent their days touring the town of London, walking in the footsteps of Charles Dickens and William Shakespeare, and spent their evenings attending theatre performances, all as part of SRSU coursework related to literature and theatre. Trippers included Kayla Perkins, Christina Esparza, Ashley Page and Karibeth Page, Adrian Soto, Leca Addison and Brooke Addison (Angelo State University student), Madelyn C. Farmer, Matt Hall, and Angela Greenroy. (Photo by Angela Greenroy).

Down the River with Tom, Huck, Joe, and Schwab

The script for Tom Sawyer and the Jackson Island Pirates was directed by and adapted from the Mark Twain novel Tom Sawyer by Gregory M. Schwab, Professor of Theatre. Schwab’s play follows an epic pirating adventure between three close friends--Tom, Huck Finn and Joe Harper--as they escape to a river island and attempt to live as pirates on their own.

Our China Connection

Dr. Quint Thurman, Provost, and Cesario Valenzuela, Vice President of Finance and Operations, visited China on a mission to recruit juniors, seniors and grad students from Heze University in Heze and Qufu University in Qufu.

Concepción Gomez, Adrian Soto and Michael Lopez

Mike Castrignano, a graduate assistant coach for the SRSU baseball team, will leave with two degrees and at least two minor league championships. He arrived in Alpine four years ago with $65 in his pocket and a dream.

Field of Dreams

Geology and Bikes are Professor’s Passions

Dr. Kevin Urbanczyk, Sul Ross State University Professor of Geology in the Earth and Physical Sciences Department and Director of Rio Grand Research Center has biked with the likes of George W. Bush and Lance Armstrong. He participates in and leads the Rincon Loop of the Chihuahuan Desert Bike Fest as a geological tour.

Advisor for the Sul Ross Geology Club, Urbanczyk also began the Sul Ross Hancock Hill Club, which restores and maintains bike trails on college property east of the Sul Ross campus.
At the SRSU Cactus Garden

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