Carlsbad or Bust

by

Harry Schwetheim

Illustrated

Kerrville, Texas
The Kerr Company
1937
To
Forrest Salter
Jimmie Beddingsfield
and
Ted Patton
School would be out in another week and what could we do during the long summer. I knew. Let's take a trip. But where and how. After looking over a map of the United States we decided to go West. "Go West young man, go West." And that's just what we did. Our folks weren't in favor of the trip so we had to buy our own car. After getting about thirty dollars each, we bought a very ancient model "T" Ford for twenty-five dollars and began making plans. We decided to go to Carlsbad Caverns in New Mexico and if the car was still running and if we had any money left we would go farther. After about a week's preparation we were all set to go. We left on a Saturday morning in a slow rain loaded with tools, spare tires, baking wire, and other things a model "T" needs to keep it running. Besides all this we had bedding, suitcases, cameras, rain coats, lanterns, flashlights, cooking utensils, and about sixty dollars for gasoline and spending money.
The first day we went from Keriville to Ft. Stockton which amounted to two hundred and seventy long miles. It took us fourteen hours which is an average of about twenty miles an hour. The first day's trip included one of the worst rains I have ever had the pleasure of being caught in. About ten miles from Sanora the rain loaded on us with almost drowned us both feet and before we reached the city limits. We had taken our lunch and the only dry place we could find to eat was in the railroad station. We waited about an hour for the rain to stop but it only came down harder so we left Sanora in a blinding rain storm. The roads looked like rivers and there was so much water in the can we could have gone
swimming. Weather in West Texas is very sunny so in about three hours of rain the sun came out and was so hot we soon were dry again. We had no sooner gotten dry when we came upon one of the steepest and loneliest hills I have ever seen. It was the only way, so down we went. About half way down we were going so fast our top almost blew off so we decided to slow up a bit. The brakes were slammed on but the car only jerked for a second and then sped on. The brakes were burned out. There we were, half way down the hill, no brakes, and going about sixty miles an hour in a very rickety car. We all hung on for dear life and finally reached the bottom, very much to our surprise. About the only thing we saw into the rest of the day was one detour after another. The heavy rain had washed out all the bridges and most of the road all the way to New Mexico. We heard that it was the heaviest rain West Texas had had in years and we would have to be careful in it. After a long day we reached Ft. Stockton where we spent the night in
a tourist cabin. That night we looked the town over and wrote cards to the folks back home, telling them all was in tip-top shape. We didn't mention the brakes and heavy rains.

Sunday morning we got up early, repaired our brakes, filled the tank with gasoline, and were once more ready to go. Before we left Ft. Stockton we attracted much attention, and this is why. On the back of our car we had a sign which read, "Carlsbad or Bust," and other signs, such as, "Watch The Fords Go By," all over the car. Besides all this we had our belongings tied all over, including a false radio aerial on the top. Our four horns helped make the car look very funny while the spartive pull of knots also added to the beauty of our covered wagon. As we left we gave everyone a treat by riding down the main street honking all the horns at the same time. We attracted this much attention almost everywhere we went.

After traveling all morning we finally reached the border and entered New Mexico. At three thirty we arrived at White's City just six miles from the caves. We decided to go out and have a look at the cave entrance.
and then came back to White's City and spent the night. Off we went and what should we run into but a hill much longer and steeper than the one on which our brakes were burned out. Only this time we had to go up instead of down. There were too many in the car so

Jimmie, Ted, and Forrest walked up while I drove up. I don't think they liked it much but that's just what happened. I didn't take long to reach the cave after that so we were soon looking into the huge entrance to Carlsbad Caverns.

We spent the night in a cabin in White's City. Water had to be hauled to this little city because there was no water fit to drink near it so in every room signs
were mailed telling us to use as little water as possible.

Monday morning we once again started up the long hill and I drove up as the day before. As they walked up and I slowly drove up we got a good look at the plant and animal life in this country. All that was

«NOTICE»

This Water is Hauled
Twenty-One Miles
We can use all we want
But we must not waste it!

...The Management

to be seen was cactus, rattlesnakes, lizards, scorpions, and one or two rabbits that escaped the rattlesnakes. Before leaving home we had planned to sleep on the ground but when we saw the rattlesnakes as thick as fleas in a dog's back we thought it would be safer to sleep in a cabin.

Just before we went through the cave we met some people from Oklahoma who went through with us. When accompanied by them we were admitted free which saved us each a dollar and a half. At ten o'clock we started through the gawe and the most wunderful
trips any of us had ever taken. Within we beheld grotesque formations, frozen cascades, daisy fairylands, yawning chasms, and grunts of antiquity. They staggered imagination and seem as unusual and unreal as a fantastic dream. At twelve thirty we reached the lunch room seven-hundred and fifty feet below the surface, where we ate and had a brief rest. In the lunch room we met Mr. White, the discoverer of the caverns. He was selling books telling about his discovery. After lunch we started on the second part of the trip. When we were about a mile from the entrance the whole bunch of seven-hundred and fifty feet we were with all sat around the huge rock of ages and the lights were all turned out. This rock was several million years old and reached the ceiling of the cave. As we sat around
it in the darkest dark I have ever seen some of the rangers far down in the cave sang, "Rock of Ages," and slowly turned on the lights beginning far down in the cave. The silence, singing, and terrible darkness was the most impressive part of the whole trip.

We finally got out of the cave at about three O'Clock and were very depressed to see a very dark sky and a slight rain. We were determined to go on so off we drove and headed towards El Paso. It was a hundred and twenty miles to El Paso but we were determined to drive the whole distance without stopping. After driving about ten miles the car began missing and a slow steady rain began falling. The dirt road we were on soon became very muddy and slippery which only added to our difficulties. The rain continued forth with all its fury and soon every gully in West Texas was full to the brim and of course we were right in the middle of them. Cars were lined up on both sides of the first gully but since our 1927 model "T" was built so high we went right through the high water without even getting wet. We went through the second also leaving the muden
low built cars far behind with their motors drawn out. Third time is a charm so right into the third one we went but low and behold it was about four feet deep and there we sat right in the middle of the roaring gully. We put all our clothing on the seats because the water was all over the floor board and motor. We could barely see the radiator cap above the muddy water. We were not to stay long however because a huge truck backed into the water and threw us a chain. After tying it to our axle the truck began pulling us out with yanks and jerks. When we were out of the water our motor was full of water and the radius rod completely jerked out. We tied the broken rod up with baling wire and drained the water from the motor and were ready once again to continue our journey. A car pulled us about a mile before the motor started and when it did start it sounded more like a thrashing machine. That night we worked in a filling station for our supper; not because we had no money but because we wanted to save our money and because the man in the station needed help.
We reached El Paso the next morning at 5 o'clock very much in need of sleep, food, and repairs. We slept first, then ate and left the repairs until the next day.
That afternoon Jimmie, Ted, and I went into old Mexico while Forrest stayed at our tourist cabin and slept. We spent nearly all our money and wrote to the folks across the boarder many post cards back home using Mexican stamps.
Next to the caverns here in Juarez was the most interesting. We visited nearly every shop and place of business including a drug store where we got a Mexican ice cream soda. (It wasn't so hot.) After taking a last look at Juarez we went back to our cabin where Forrest was still sound asleep. That night we saw a show and took a good look at El Paso's night life. (It wasn't so hot either.)
The next morning as we were preparing to leave, Jimmie, backed the car into the garage and once more we had a broken radius rod. We found ourselves a poor bunch
of mechanics so we had our broken rod repaired at a garage. After working on the motor ourselves we were once more on our way headed for Del Rio.

We drove and we drove and we drove some more but not even a filling station could be found so we proceeded to spend a very restless night on a very hard rock pile. The rock pile was picked because we didn't want too many rattlesnakes as bed partners or quit so many scorpions. Rock piles sound like just the place for these snakes and insects however these particular rocks were very very small so only one or two of each were found. The night began with a nice little rock fight and ended with the terrible noise of a huge freight train which speed by about sixty feet from us. In the dark we hadn't seen the tracks so when it came by while we were asleep we thought for sure the world was coming to an end.

At noon the next day Alpine was reached after a very interesting trip through the Davis Mountains and old Ft. Davis. In the mountains we saw a small bunch of
antelope and tried to get pictures of them but they were too far away and the pictures revealed only the scenery. From Alpine we headed Sanderson where we ate supper and saw a good show. While in the show another me of those west Texas rains rained but we left Sanderson and headed for Del Rio just the same.

After traveling until "Bare Cane" midnight, Longty, was reached where we were forced to spend the night because of a ferocious rain and thunder storm. The only cabin to be had was a very small one with only one bed so a coin was flipped to see who slept in it. Forrest and I were the lucky ones so Jimmie and Ted spent the night on the floor. In Longty the next morning we visited Judge Roy Bean's old house and saloon where we
sound the old sign reading, "Law West of The Pecos", still mailed to the roof. Taking a last good look we once more headed for Del Rio and reached it at noon where we prepared to see the sights and spend the night. Once more we crossed the boarder where nothing was found but saloons, shoe shine boys, and curios. Back in Del Rio we went for a swim and saw a good show before turning in for the night.

The next morning we headed for home and said farewell to Mexico and West Texas. From Del Rio we went through Bracketville, Uvalde, Sabinal, Hondo, and Bandera. Near Bandera our motor began making such a terrible noise we scared all the deer out of the country. It was a connecting rod but our faithful car carried on till we reached dear old Kerrville where it gave a sigh of relief and didn't utter another sound until a good rest and an overhaulings.

On this trip we covered over 1500 miles, one foreign country, two states, went through three of the worst rain storms you can imagine, had one breakdown, no
slots, and drove home on our own power and believe it or not, we were ready to start the whole trip all over again.

The End