



SWBS goes to the Texas mountains

With a later than usual arrival time planned, Friday afternoon 7 planes and 3 SUVs arrived at Alpine, TX, (E38). Last arrivals were approximately 3:30 pm so we could get checked into the Hampton Inn and gather in the lobby to board our three large SUVs to go to dinner at 5pm. Dinner was planned at Reata Restaurant, arguably the best in Alpine, and they did not disappoint. Our three tables were ready for us as we walked in. We had 19 SWBS members at dinner, and being the social group we are, the third table decided to abandon their table and move over and join in at the other two tables. The more the merrier! Dinner was fantastic and their pre-dinner bread and butter was incredible. I think everyone enjoyed the quick service and excellent food there.

Reata obviously runs a very good restaurant! (Their only other sister Reata restaurant is in Fort Worth). Time was somewhat cramped for dinner, as we had a 7:15 Star Party planned at the McDonald Observatory.

SOUTHWEST BONANZA SOCIETY

BOARD MEMBERS

Ron Nelson	President
Nancy Faust	Vice President
Trey Segura	Treasurer
Randy Starbuck	Secretary
Jim Clement	At Large Member
Dan Drew	At Large Member
Charles Hoffman	At Large Member

UPCOMING EVENTS

- Tyler, TX (TYR) Chili Cook off & Poker Run
3/22/24
- Fredericksburg, TX (T82)
Soar Eclipse
4/7/24
- Beach Run 2024
4/26/24
- West Houston, TX (KIWS)
Annual Lunch Meeting
5/11/24
- Durango, CO (KDRO)
SWBS to Colorado!
6/7/24

For more information on any of these events check out [SWBS website](#).

Unfortunately, the first of two unplanned circumstances occurred Friday night: as luck would have it, there was a high solid overcast that night preventing any star viewing. Half of our group (two SUVs) decided to go see the Observatory anyway. They had an interesting scientific presentation, and a little hands-on time with a few of the telescopes. But no actual stars to see. The other half of the group went back to the hotel lobby to enjoy some snacks and drinks and conversation.

On the way home from the Observatory, in very dark conditions, on top of the mountain, with nobody's cell phone getting any service, we left for the 45-minute drive back to Alpine. I (your author) happened to be looking at the clock on the dash at 9:45. And in front of my eyes, the clock changed to 8:45. I made a casual comment about it, that it must be picking up a cell tower or GPS signal from out near El Paso... We were following SUV #1 on this dark and starless night. All of a sudden, we see the brake lights come on. We pull up beside them and ask what's wrong. Two words clearly come out in the cold dark desert mountain air: "We're lost!" No names mentioned here, to protect the innocent, but the driver's initials are DD.

The two SUVs of hardy Observatory fans arrived at the hotel around 10:40 pm Friday, ready to show up for our day of Big Bend National Park, which began Saturday with breakfast in the hotel before 8am and a lobby rally at 8am to begin our long day of adventuring. We left the hotel in the SUVs with 18 people, intentionally leaving one sick member behind at the hotel. First stop: pick up our sandwich lunch before we head into the desert for a 2 hour drive to Big Bend. The second of our unplanned circumstances then occurred: Our timing was just slightly off to get our sandwiches, as a couple minutes before that an order of 40 sandwiches had been made by a tour bus. So, an executive decision had to be made: wait and waste 45 minutes of our day, or venture into the desert without lunch in hand. We got in the SUVs and began driving south.

**SOUTHWEST
BONANZA
SOCIETY**

NEXT EVENT

Tyler, TX (TYR)
Chili Cook off &
Poker Run

3/22/24

Hotel rate good
until Feb.22 so
make your reser-
vations now.

**Prizes for the
best chili.**

Register at

[SWBS website](#)

Our wonderful drivers.



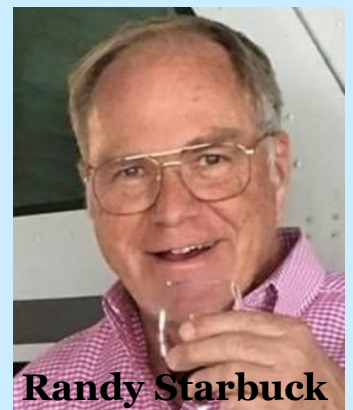
Dan Drew

**T
h
a
n
k**



Harold Kennedy

**Y
o
u
!**



Randy Starbuck

Our day of Big Bend National Park, which began Saturday with breakfast in the hotel before 8am and a lobby rally at 8am to begin our long day of adventuring. We left the hotel in the SUVs with 18 people, intentionally leaving one sick member behind at the hotel. First stop: pick up our sandwich lunch before we head into the desert for a 2 hour drive to Big Bend. The second of our unplanned circumstances then occurred: Our timing was just slightly off to get our sandwiches, as a couple minutes before that an order of 40 sandwiches had been made by a tour bus. So, an executive decision had to be made: wait and waste 45 minutes of our day, or venture into the desert without lunch in hand. We got in the SUVs and began driving south. With a quick bathroom break at a gas station outside the National Park entrance, we entered the



National Park and immediately headed down the gravel road to Santa Elena Canyon. The weather had cleared from the night before, so full blue skies and sun as we reached Santa Elena Canyon at approximately 11am. Beautiful sunny views of the rock canyon walls, and about half of our group headed for the short trail into the canyon which splits the US and Mexico. After an hour of enjoying the sunshine and

stretching our legs, back in the vehicles to head up into the Chisos mountains. About an hour drive up there, and we arrived in time for the visitor center to still be serving lunch at their café, and most immediately did that, followed by light hiking and exploring around the Chisos basin, and enjoying the mountain views. It doesn't really look at all like Texas there.

Dinner plans were at the famous Starlight Theater restaurant in Terlingua, and again they did not disappoint on local culture/flair and also dinner. We had about 30 minutes before our reservation time, so we hung out on their front porch with numerous other patrons, enjoying the 100-mile view, some enjoying a refreshing beverage during the wait.



Dinner seating was at two tables, and there are strong rumors there was a different level of wait service at the two different tables; but the food was excellent and again everyone was happy. Back in the 3 SUVs to drive almost 2 hours back to the pocket of civilization of Alpine.

On the way, in the middle of the dark desert, we made a 5-minute stop along the road to get out and see the amazing dark sky stars. Something you can't see from Houston or Dallas or San Antonio areas! Everyone arrived back at the hotel at 10pm, as expected.

Overall, a busy and packed weekend, as was expected. Everything is so far apart out there in west Texas, that the logistics of getting around make things difficult. A special thanks to our drivers, Randy Starbuck, Harold Kennedy, and Dan Drew, who made a



2.5 hour drive each way to provide the group with transportation. Then all day driving on Saturday. The members of SWBS are amazing people.

Sunday morning departures went off without a hitch, mostly, even with the

30 mph winds straight down the runway.

I would say we are all ready for the next SWBS adventure.

Ron Nelson

