

Hi Everyone!

What a stunning sight Pinnacles is for those, like myself, who have never been deep enough inside the park to appreciate its beauty. I had been there for Nate and Susan's wedding but had no idea what laid beyond that dry summer meadow. It's truly magical and though not a completely unique phenomenon, unique enough to be recently deemed a National Park and photogenic enough to command a lot of attention to its colors, forms and surprising niches. Little waterfalls (or as Devin said, "water fountains") peek out from the crevasses and streams of light peek into the caves that engaged the children enough to distract them from the multitude of steps they had to climb to maneuver through them.



We arrived, had lunch and were shuttled to the area from which there was a .7 mile walk, a bit uphill, to the caves. I must admit I got a number of complaints from the littlest ones but we managed to get them there with a few piggy back rides, pushes or whatever it took from my tool box of songs and tricks to get them to continue forward to a place they had no idea if they would like or not.

What fascinated me was the immediate transformation of the children's moods as soon as we stepped into the coolness and magic of the caves. The filtered light and sound of little waterfalls was enchanting and the ways we had to bend, lean, etc made it like a ride at Disneyland.

the kids recharged and were refreshed as soon as they ahead to the hand at making stepped in to clung to their toes anything else and no cause for distress.



Ultimately all their batteries by the beauty stepped out of the caves and were willing to forge Reservoir and hang out for a while. We tried our ripples in the water with pebbles and a few discover to their dismay that little leeches had on the way out. It was more of a surprise than more wildlife than they had bargained for :) but

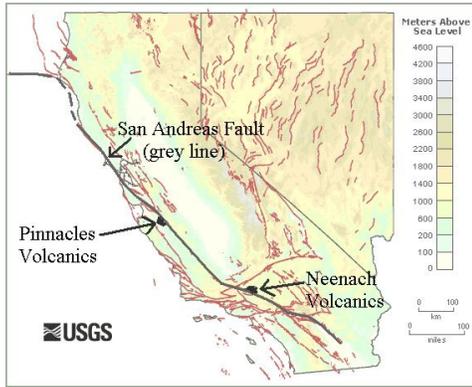


We also saw damselflies (the blue dragonflies), a huge dragonfly molting and got to study its intricate wing design. We saw vultures and ducks flying overhead, and sited Indian Warrior, a plant that they say grows where a warrior once stood. We chose not to eat miner's lettuce because it grew next to something that could

have been hemlock but wasn't but was too close to risk, according to Nate.



We had spelunkers dunking into the wonderful pumpkin-oatmeal muffins Donald and I made the night before and all were happy. We returned via an alternative path that allowed us to feel the lovely late afternoon breeze, chat away and take in this amazing creation of shapes all formed out of compressed



Volcanic ash (tufa dust) that was created underground and as the fault moved North, the mountains became exposed and was etched into forms over millions of years. According to Nate, the caves are talus caves and were formed as a volcano (perched on the coast) spewed lava from its top. The lava cooled. Over millennia, waves washed away the inside of the remnant volcano leaving the surrounding Laval shell. Plates then shifted and split the volcano. The part we visited is the traveling northbound section. The other half of the volcano is about two hundred miles away and is north of Los Angeles. The caves here were formed as the shell eroded and cracked causing them to collapse on each other.

There are similar formations at Shiprock, in New Mexico, and Valle de la Luna, where I've visited in Chile. You can see these on the web and point out the similarities and differences to the kids if you so choose. There is even an additional Valle de le Luna in Bolivia as well.

I loved how Devin, our newest friend, felt so at home with us by the end of the trip, begging all my stories out of my somewhat rusty storyteller's repertoire and so delighted to hear one more story. Can't say I didn't enjoy that!



The lovely sharing that Nico and Elijah displayed, part of being the "big brothers," was great to see and Devin even mentioned how nice Nico was when he shared my phone with her when she asked.



I am seeing so much more maturity in their behavior and demeanor towards each other. I said I would give the kids extra credit if they said hello and thank you to the shuttle bus drivers and they proudly jumped right in. Acknowledging, for example; Andrew, for taking the most steps since he was the youngest and his steps were the smallest met with "why didn't I get acknowledged?" So I went around and honored each one individually.

I asked the kids what they liked best and they said:

Devin - the beauty of the water fountains [falls] in the caves  
 Nico - Climbing to the top (we went considerably high up after coming out

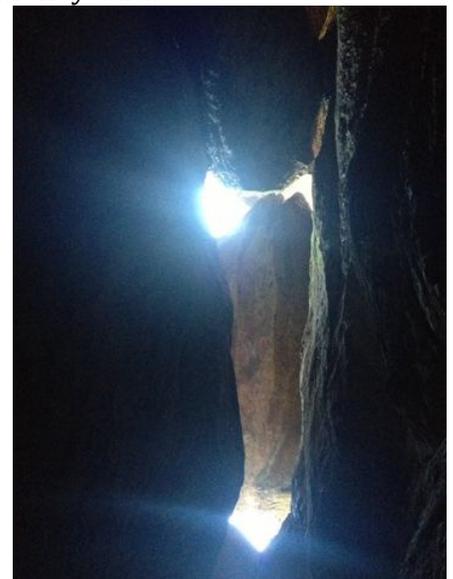
of the caves)

Alyssa - The ice cream

Elijah was into his books too much to participate in that one.

Andrew was still recovering, but we hope he had a sense of accomplishment after such a large achievement comparatively of keeping up with all the goings on....

So the ice cream was a hit at the end, as were the muffins and the car rides both to the park and back were equally smooth. I was especially



proud and relieved since this one was even longer than Mt. Tam and there were only a few "Are we there yet?" which was impressive for a 2 hour trip.



We adore your kids and are so honored to travel with them. Nate is suggesting we go to Big Basin on our next journey and Cowboy Cliff at Ravenswood Ranch is hankering to have us back, perhaps in June.

We are excited about Yosemite! Our reservations are in place and hope that you will pass the word around to families since there is more room and lots of upcoming excitement. More new friends are planning on joining us and more learning is coming our way from Nate and others.

A special thanks to Rebecca Garewal and Kiran, who are "professional Geo and Earth Cachers," who joined us today to see what we do. It was such a pleasure to have Kiran back and Rebecca join us. Both are true nature lovers and from whom we can learn so much!

Thanks to Nate and Susan and Luke for sharing their time with us and to Donald for laying out these photos of mine since unfortunately he couldn't be our trip photographer this time.



Look so forward to the next time and to seeing everyone able to go!

Sincerely,

Chaia