

The Beast of Bandelier

By Romana 08/22/2015



It was a Saturday in early May, 1967, when two of my Air Force buddies and I decided to visit Bandelier National Monument, located not far from Los Alamos, New Mexico. We got a late start, so it was near evening when we got there.

There are two sections to the monument; we went to the main one. It is famous for its volcanic formations and Native American constructions. A smaller section lies northeast from the main section.

There were warning signs at fenced boundaries that said the area was very dangerous to hike in, due to unexploded ordnance. During World War II, the wooded area next to the Los Alamos laboratory was mined to prevent spies from getting information about atomic bomb components that were being constructed there.



One of the many prominent eroded lava cliff formations.

No mention of the land mines appears anywhere on the internet today. The Los Alamos Laboratory has a program for removing land mines world-wide. Perhaps they initiated this program by removing their own land mines. It is creepy that this has been covered up, since there might still be land mines that were missed.

The cliff faces were eerie. Here, the Native American *Puebloans* dug extensively into the rock, made of volcanic tuff, to make caves, lodges, and containing walls.



We climbed up to a reconstructed dwelling on a cliff. It was built to show how Puebloans set up their lodges. We did not go in, because it was not allowed. We would hardly have fit, anyway. The people who had built it had been a lot smaller than us.



There were remains of a massive wall on the ground below the cliffs. There was a rustling sound from the nearby trees. What was that? Whatever it was, the long shadows of approaching dusk were masking it from view.



We saw what was left of a giant ceremonial *kiva*, a circular area or building used by the Puebloans for religious rituals. These people lived in that area until about 1550, when a long drought forced them to leave.

It was getting dark. Our visit would soon have to end, but there was discussion among us that we were being watched.



As the available light faded, I took last pictures of reconstructed ladders leading to carved-out caves in the rock face. We had to start packing up and get ready to leave.



Suddenly, this big black creature emerged from the shadow of a tree. Was it some kind of a fox? It was difficult to see, but it did not seem to be afraid of us. It was coming to investigate us!

It was a giant squirrel, far larger than any squirrel any of us had seen before. It was taunting me to take pictures, but the lens aperture and the ISO speed of my Miranda single-lens-reflex was not up to the task. I tried, but the slides came back black.

Later, I learned that it had been an Albert's squirrel, with a body two feet long, and a tail that added another two feet. It was not what any of us had expected to encounter at nightfall.



We finished our adventure by getting pizza at the *Casa Luna* restaurant in Los Alamos.