

Digging Up the Past

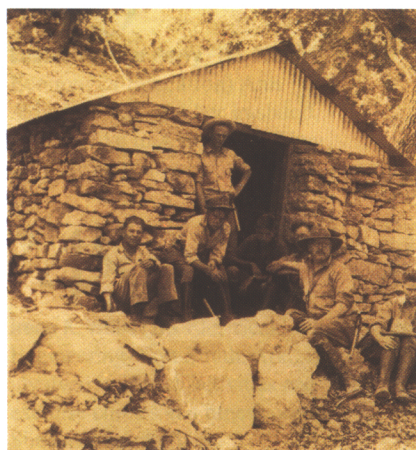
Photos courtesy of Southwest Collection/
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TOP Collecting fossils in San Andres Canyon. ABOVE Off for a motor boat ride on the [Elephant Butte] lake.

One of the benefits of working in an archives is the pleasure of discovering little gems within our holdings. Such was the case when I came across a little black scrapbook. This item had all the hallmarks that make an item historically valuable—charming little black and white photographs, each individually identified, specific dates and locations, names of the people pictured, and related materials in other collections at the archives.

The little scrapbook depicts the first Field Geology class trip to New Mexico



from June 7-July 14, 1927. Dr. Leroy Thompson Patton took several students to survey areas such as the Guadalupe Mountains, Carlsbad Caverns, Ruidoso, Sierra Blanca and the San Andreas Canyon. The students included J. F. Clingingsmith, Percy Denton, J. T. Gist, John McElroy, Henry Mobley, Lloyd Preatt, Eldon Thorpe and W. T. Reed. Later, field geology specimen gathering expeditions included a 1929 trip to Carrizozo, N.M., and the Sierra Blanca Mountains; a 1930 trip to the south end of the Sandia Mountains of New Mexico; and a 1931 three day trip to Railroad Mountain Dike.

Patton, a graduate of the University of Iowa, came to Lubbock in 1924 to survey the geology of the area. In a letter to Paul Whitfield Horn, Ph.D., Patton assured the newly elected Texas Technological president that water was definitely present underneath the campus and surrounding area. He also suggested that thorough logs be kept on the well drilling to provide an overall picture of the campus's true underground conditions and future well availability. The letter closed with Patton's reply that he would be glad to give Horn a detailed account of how to establish geology coursework at the new college as it would give him "...an opportunity to demonstrate my fitness for an appointment."

Impressed with Patton, Horn eventually offered the enthusiastic young man a position. "At the time I applied for

a job Dr. Horn hadn't planned to have a geology department. I had to sell him on a geology department and on myself," Patton stated, adding that he had agreed to Horn's request that should not enough students apply to take geology that Patton would then teach chemistry. "Incidentally, I never have taught chemistry," he proudly boasted.

So beloved by his students was Patton that they wrote up a plan of action to support him when rumors circulated that Patton was being considered for the next Texas Tech president. The plan outlined why his students and former students believed Patton was qualified for the job and how he had shaped the geology department into being "one of the largest if not the largest in the U. S." Unfortunately, their efforts did not come to fruition but Patton went on to spend 25 successful years with Texas Tech. He was a strong advocate for the Seismological Observatory and served as its director. His retirement in 1951 sadly marked the decline of the observatory, which was finally demolished in December of 1998. ■

BELOW Packed up and ready to go once more-leaving Ruidoso. MIDDLE RIGHT Breakfast in camp, Carlsbad Cavern. BOTTOM RIGHT At the summit (Canyons of the Sierra Blanca)—a lecture at 12,003 ft. above sea level. BOTTOM LEFT In the Guadalupe Mountains.

