



Arizona Rocks 51

Text and photos by Ray Grant

Continuing with places of geological interest in the Verde Valley, about 8 million years ago a lake filled the Verde Valley and as the lake water evaporated, different rocks were deposited in the valley (See last month's Arizona Rocks about the salt and evaporite deposits.). Limestone was one of the common rocks formed. A good place to see the limestone is at Montezuma Castle National Monument. Beaver Creek has eroded a cliff in the limestone and ground water has dissolved some of the limestone and alcoves have formed. The Sinagua people built their dwellings in these alcoves from 1100 to 1425 A.D. For more information on history and archeology of Montezuma Castle, go to the National Park website (nps.gov).

At the Monument there is an interesting geological site that unfortunately is not open to the public. It is locally called "Elephant Hill" and there are a series of mammalian track ways there. I was told that they had been buried to prevent vandalism, but I have found some references describing them. Tracks of tapir, camel, mastodon and an antelope-like animal have been found. The area was likely the shoreline of a watering hole. It was a marsh or shallow water and the animals left footprints in the soft sediment. A couple of other track sites are reported in the Verde Valley. Vertebrate fossil remains are not common in the Verde Formation. Rodent and bat teeth and some bones and a few tusk parts from mastodons are all that have been found.



Montezuma Castle and the limestone of the Verde Formation



Mastodon tracks at "Elephant Hill" (This was a slide in the collection at Mesa Community College when I arrived there, no idea of the photographer.)



Montezuma Castle Outdoor Exhibit 1950's
In the mid 1950's an outdoor diorama was constructed near Montezuma Castle. This exhibit is still enjoyed by visitors to the monument today!
NPS photo