

Tue27Mar07 - "Riding The Storm Out"

A high wind (50-60 mph) and thunderstorm warning for today blew many of our best made plans away. The storm was windy, but Mojave remained almost totally dry. The cold front causing the concern dropped temperatures quite a bit - we ended up either in multiple layers in the field, or walking around huddled "Against the Wind" (see REO Speedwagon & Bob Seger on iTunes, or ask your parents about their 33+1/3 record recollections).

My AM group switched to helping Dr. Jim Nienow get photo records (courtesy of Ben Haller) of blue green algae soil crust growth patterns, and prospecting for large (football sized) white rocks (marble or quartz) hoping that they would be hosting hypolithic algae underneath them, and that we could take soil temperatures around & under them. First goal, no problem (after we got used to NOT stepping on the microbial mats!), but we couldn't find a suitably (gigantor) sized hypolithic algae host marble or quartz rock to take the soil temperatures around.

Our site was the Cima Volcanic Field lava advance edge, which was just chock full of black basalt shards, blue green algae soil crusts (which are actually black - they manufacture their own sunblock, which keeps out harmful UV radiation, but is transparent to the light wavelengths they use for photosynthesis), but only small samples of hypolithic algae. It also is accessible by a VERY soft, eroded, bumpy road. My back went out on the way back (good pun, but painful).

After some better living through chemistry, some Tai Chi, and the motivation to join an Afton Canyon field trip, I was "back" on the road, and ended up ascending the canyon wall (to within ~3 meters)! First, we had to step over the Mighty Mojave River without getting our booties wet. Remember, the Mojave is a desert, so the "source river" of it's valley looks not much more impressive than the urine flow from large farm animals meandering down their pasture gully. A nice trip home, some FANTASTIC home cooking, and a midcourse correction assessment science meeting after dinner rounded out the day. Tomorrow - webcast!

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