

DECEMBER 2018

SATURDAY 15/12

Myself and Erin got ourselves onto what's called a data-logging trip to Glenwood Caverns in Glenwood Springs, I wrote this piece for Underground.

MILE HIGH CAVERNS

I went to Colorado safe in the knowledge that there would be many trips to scratch my itch for caving. This trip was no exception, although it was not a scaffolding trip into Shannon, nor was it a race between two groups doing a Poll na Tagha - Pollpruglish crossover trip, it was an interesting one and a first for me.

The purpose of the trip was to recover temperature data from automatic logging stations located throughout the caverns, this happens every ninety days to ensure no data is lost due to flat batteries. The location, the fairy caves atop the hill overlooking the town of Glenwood Springs. The caverns, discovered in the late 1800s, have been a show cave attraction since the turn of the millennium. The local cavers tell me that usually they ride a cablecar to the top of the mountain to get to the cave, unfortunately for my visit the cable was down for a winter overhaul. From what I gather there is a very healthy line of communication between the owners and the local caving community, and for example rudimentary airlocks have been fitted to the entrances to prevent excessive drying out of the cave, and the data-logging is part of this effort to monitor the health of the cave.

So on a chilly Saturday morning we met in a car park by the motorway at 6:30 in the morning. The early hour was so that we could beat the ski traffic heading up I-70 to ski resorts like Beaver Creek or Vail. After a 3 hour jaunt up the motorway and slight oxygen deprivation as we gained another mile of altitude to crest Vail Pass. That said when we got to Glenwood Springs it was steak for breakfast before caving.

Following a slow drive up the hill (on snow) to the parking spot, and a pretty chilly changing session, the 12 of us split into a few groups to hit all the necessary data loggers, while two lads headed off to measure up a section of passage for an air lock door, to keep the moisture in the cave.

The leader of my group, Mike, brought us to Black Grotto first (a location which he usually cannot find, often claiming that it's been removed for cleaning!). Once we'd checked the data loggers near the entrance section of the cave we headed toward the far end of the show cave and hit an interesting one at the bottom of a semi precarious crawl down through some pretties. What made that area interesting was the show cave illumination that had recently been converted

to LED from incandescent lighting. This had the obvious effect of cooling the area but the unexpected effect of allowing the formations to begin growing once again!

I was to go to Wind Cave National Park for a surveying trip the weekend of the deadline for this article but with the US government shutdown there is no caving on federal land for the moment. Wind cave has a surveyed length of over 149 miles (240 km) so far. An incredible length only slightly overshadowed by the near by Jewel Cave National Park which broke 200 miles (321 km) in late October / early November 2018.