

June 2025

Saturday 7th

Erin, Jake, and myself went down to the South-Western Regional at Royal John Mine (which has a natural entrance). The drive is pretty far and we left on Thursday and worked from a hotel in ABQ on Friday. After work we headed down I-25 towards T or C, had a spot of dinner there and set out towards Silver City (though we weren't going that far). Friday night we met everyone, saw some old faces and saw some new ones too.

Saturday morning started with a business meeting for the region, then they turned to planning the day's caving, since we were all going to the same cave. Simultaneously it was both over and under planned -- I think that'll make sense to most cavers. Myself, Erin, Jake, Kevin, Jen, and Nikki grouped up to do a through trip in the natural entrance and out the mine entrance. In hind sight I am glad that we did it this way because the mine part seemed particularly sketchy (compared to cave in general) and I don't think that many of our group would have done the trip if we had encountered that at the beginning. Overall the trip into the cave was pretty short, we were only in for a few hours -- maybe 3? The natural part of the cave was pretty short but quite fun, not particularly sporty, but still fun. There was a flat out belly crawl along solid rock for about 50-60 feet. A cute climb before that over a pool of water. Then it got really muddy as we got towards the lake room, like John Thomas in Fermanagh levels of muddy. That was really fun especially for New Mexico. Speaking of really fun and different from the New Mexican caves that I frequent, was the lake room. We had been under the impression that we would need to swim across the lake -- so we wore wetsuits -- this proved not to be the case, for there was a narrow path around the lakeshore. But Jen had brought an inflatable boat all this way (since she wasn't too keen on the swim). She blew it up and I paddled the two of us around the lake room, while Kevin & John Cockran (I think) took photos. Kevin had given Jen a flash in a Zip lock bag to dunk into the water to illuminate the water. The other groups in the cave that day were mainly doing out & back trips to the lake room via the mine entrance.

After getting out of the water and stowing the boat, Jen, Nikki, and I left the lake room via the rickety ladder and uneven stairs with PVC pipe handles... this place was never going to pass a fire marshal's inspection! After we got to the top of the stairs we then ended up in the mined area, characterised by the jagged rocks and sketchy timbers. We each waited our turn to climb down a scree slope to a lower level (where we could descend to our exit level), we stood by another portal that had been blocked up by the mine reclamation contractors. When we all got to that next lower level we were met with a fixed hand line of hardware store rope of unknown age. We were to use that hand line to get over a ledge where we would then step onto the top rung of a 100 year old ladder (which wasn't even a well made ladder -- just wood nailed together). Jen had a bit of trouble with this because she couldn't get her legs onto the top rung, I ran through a hail of falling rock to get a better vantage point and was successfully able to guide her to the rung. Within another 5 minutes we were out and not a moment too soon because there was a howling breeze going down that adit.

We got out at a reasonable hour and had a grand evening complete with angel food cake. The drive back started the next morning and we drove straight home save for a pit stop at the Walmart in Truth or Consequences to buy two new tyres.