

Guads Trip: October 2004

Big Manhole Dig: *by ET*

Kristen Nielsen, Randy Waslien, Hank Boudiont, ET, Steve Fleming, Steve Peerman, Dave Belski and Kathy Peerman

We decided to pack up camp and head towards the Big Manhole Dig site or cave which we were going to help with on Saturday and Sunday October 23-24. We found a campsite and settled in for the night. Next day we had a late start but we four got into one car and headed up the hill a few miles to the cave. When we got there, we had about a ½ mile walk to the parking area of the 4x4s and then a short jaunt down hill to the cave hole. It is a gated and locked cave but everyone else was already there and working. We followed the sound of the generator and found the entrance. R and K had helped dig at this site several times before. The rappel in is about 50 feet and you land on the side of a big breakdown pile. There is one old dig hole that still has timbers in it from the old dig. The new dig is following the air alongside the walls. The cave bells out into a maybe an 80-100 feet diameter room with that big breakdown pile in the middle. The dig is down about 30 feet. This was the first weekend that the BLM was allowing electric instruments to be used so they had brought up a generator and a compressor to run the air hammer or chisel. They also had electric lights. Bear in mind that Big Manhole Cave entrance is on BLM land and it is right on top of Lechiguilla cave, which has an entrance on National Park service land. If the cavers dig into Lech, they will have to stop digging and let in the scientists first, then maybe in a few years or so the cavers can go into Lechiguilla and further explore it. Right now exploration in Lech is a campout with many hours just to get to the campsite in the cave. Then the cavers can go on to survey and explore (after the scientists). So another entrance will shorten the stay in the cave and it can be explored and surveyed quicker. However, with two different government agencies vying for control it will be an interesting situation. I did my stint in the hole with the chisel twice and only got maybe ¾ of a bucket of debris and rock, the rest of the time was hauling buckets and just gabbing with other cavers. Hank got out a bucket and ½ of rock. Hank has a picture of me trying to dig my way

into Lechiguilla. There were I think, at least two young Arizona cavers, the Carlsbad Forest service cave specialist was digging too-though I failed to recognize her, Carl, from the SWR, Tom Stone older caver from AZ, and then the NM cavers Steve Peerman and Steve Fleming and Dave Belski, and a gal who called herself a cave wench. It was dark when we got back to the campsite. Next morning it was again a late start but when we got to Big Manhole we discovered the generator was no longer working and the three in the cave were doing survey of the dig hole and they said for us to not come down. So we waited on top and I took 4-5 loads of stuff up to the trucks. We were a little too efficient though as we had to go get another rope and rig that so Steve Peerman could climb up and rescue Steve Fleming who had ran a piece of his cows-tail into his Croll and he was stuck on rope. Peerman climbed up and supplied a knife to cut the offending piece off, then Fleming could continue on out.

