

## **SNOWY RIVER:** *by Kristen and Randy*

The South West Regional began with rain, lots and lots of rain - which is very good for New Mexico. The regional meeting was held under the awning on the Peerman's trailer. (the only dry spot). On Saturday, we joined up with several gypsy cavers to tour the main passage in the cave back to the Lake Room. This part of the cave has been known since the civil war because of the signature. It's mainly a big bore hole cave that you can walk through. The hardest part was walking on the slippery mud and the breakdown. On Sunday we volunteered to help with the photo shoot to document the new discovery in the cave, of the Snowy River Section. This documentation is used to monitor the human impact on the cave. In the future, photo's can be taken of the same sights and compared to the first photo's. We felt honored to be part of the third team to enter this particular area of the cave. For many long years cavers have been digging, trying to break into the rest of the Fort Stanton Cave. Once the break through was made, about a year and a half ago, the BLM office shut this part of the cave down till further analysis could be made. It was obvious that the Snowy River was a highly sensitive formation. Last July the first team went into the cave to do an evaluation on how to approach exploring the new discovery. Donald Davis has predicted that we will find 70 miles of passage before the exploration is over. This prediction is primarily based on the barometric winds. The cave is currently 5-6 miles long. Snowy River is an ancient dry river of white calcite popcorn. The distance is unknown at this point but at least 1 miles has been surveyed. It's hard to explain the visuals. You need to picture a river, it's pools, rapids, boulders, fluted edges and winding "S" curves. Then place this river in a brown, muddy tunnel. The contrast is spectacular. There was one room, called Stare Gazing. The ceiling and walls were covered with gypsum stars. Some of them were about 8 to 10 inches in diameter. They looked like glittering star fish clinging to the ceilings and walls. It took us 3 ½ hours to get to this section of the cave. About half of the time we were rock climbing up and down breakdowns or crawling on our bellies over mud and ball bearing rocks. A long section was through some very unstable rock. On the way out, a portion of a wall collapsed next to Randy. He was able to pass some of the larger rocks back up the slope to me, the rest rolled it's way down the 30 foot ramp. Left on the wall was a boulder big enough to plug the

passage. The remaining two of us swooped down the ramp as fast as we could. There was one climb down on a cable ladder that was not fun. Here you had to squeeze yourself through a tight crevasse, then over a rock lip while your feet searched for the ladder. At this point we had to raise and lower our packs on a rope, about 15 feet. All and all it was a fantastic trip and great opportunity - even if we have several bruises and some sore muscles to show for it.