

THE FLOWSTONE



Volume 31 | Issue 2 | Quarterly Newsletter of the Cullman Grotto of the National Speleological Society

Upcoming Events 2026

- SERA Cave Carnival – Camp Marantha in Scottsboro AL- May 7th- 10th
- SCCI Homecoming at old TAG site May 15-17th
- NSS Convention- Corydon IN July 6-10

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About our grotto

- Membership to the Grotto is \$15 per year for individual or \$20 per family. Dues are payable at the first meeting of the year (January) and includes subscription to the Flowstone.
- Grotto meetings are currently held on the first Tuesday of the month at 7:30 PM (2nd Tuesday when holiday conflicts)
- Location of meetings: 920 St. Joseph Dr. NW Cullman, AL 35055 (Church basement, East side of the building, lower parking lot)
- The Flowstone is published by the Cullman Grotto of the National Speleological Society. The club will exchange by request with any publishing grotto. Republication of any items within the Flowstone is allowed provided that credit is given to the author and source.



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Website
www.cullmangrotto.org

- Front Cover Photo – The hike down from Kolob Terrace into Upper Left Fork, Das Boot, and Subway canyon. Zion National Park, Utah

Photo by Micah Sims

Grotto Officers and Appointments 2026

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King Under the Hill

So, let's get started

Saturday Morning started as many cave trips do. Get up early and head to the meeting area. This day wasn't any different with the exception of the meeting place. Due to the location of the cave, we all met near the landowner at a local fire dept and proceeded to the parking area from there.

One of our group members had secured us permission from the landowner to visit this nice gem. This cave had been on my list for some time. It is a pull down with a couple of drops and is somewhat short as far as "through trips" go. None of us in the group had ever been through this cave or to the upper entrance, but we knew where the lower entrance was.

We parked our vehicles and started to suit up for a day underground. We talked to the landowner on the phone and asked for directions to the upper entrance, but they had never been to it. No problem, we had a map and it didn't look too far or hard to find. As we thought it wasn't a long hike at all to the entrance pit and the underbrush wasn't bad. This cave has a nice pit entrance of 100+ feet, so we started rigging. We opted to hard rig the first drop since none of us had ever been through the cave. This gave us a good insurance policy if we ran into any trouble below, and the hike back up the mountain from the truck to retrieve the rope wasn't bad at all.

After all of us made the drop, we started down some narrow stoop walking passage that went and went and then went some more. Along the way there were some nice spots that were decorated, and it was nice to see. We finally made it to a junction that went upstream and downstream. The way out clearly is to follow the water, but we opted to go the up-stream route just to see what was there. This turned out to be a wonderful idea. The passages turn immediately into really nice, draped walls and some pretty amazing formations with a variety of colors. This went on for a long distance and finally stopped in some breakdown in stream passage. The passage seemed to keep going but was starting to get low and the "pretties" had vanished from the walls and ceiling, so we opted to head on down steam again.

As we were following the water the passages started getting very canyon like and some traverses had to be made. The map had a lake listed on it so we knew we would have to do some wading to get across it. As we kept making our way down stream it started to get crawly and more crawly and then it appeared before us, The Lake. What we understood as a "wading across" lake wasn't what we encountered. We had overlooked the passage height on the map and didn't realize that this lake was going to be up to our chest and neck because you must crawl through it. Well, I guess that is all part of the caving experience and we didn't have too many other options. We could push on or turn back and deal with more crawling and then a climb. We opted for the lake and besides the lower entrance wasn't too far according to the map.

We pushed through the lake as cold as it was and as low as it was. Did I mention we didn't have wet suits or cave suits since this wasn't a long trip. Note to others: I recommend a cave suit if you take this trip, just for the record. After the group got out of the lake there is one more drop of around 35 ish feet or so to a pool below. This drop was rigged and away everyone went, down into the water. At the bottom the pool was about waist deep and then got shallower until a beach area. We encountered several bats here as there is a small colony located in this cave. The passage opens up so it is easy to walk from there until the exit is reached, which is only a couple of hundred feet or so. We made our exit to the sun and were right at our vehicles. We changed clothes, packed up gear, went to retrieve the insurance rope and then had a couple of beers at the truck. Total time in the cave was approximately 3 hours give or take 15 minutes. This was a nice short trip, we saw some nice formations, and we got to experience many aspects of caving.

"Let us go down from this place"

MS



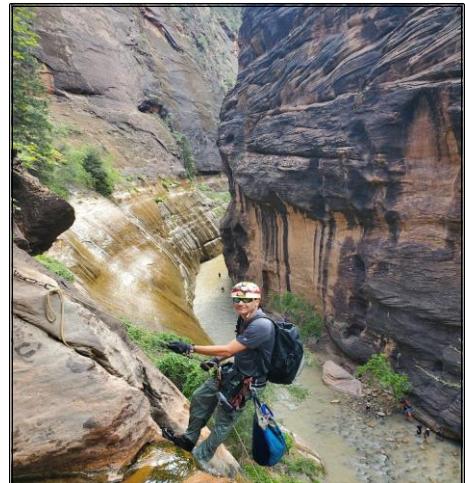
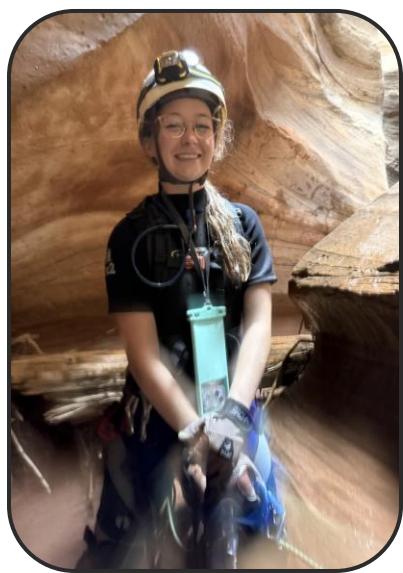
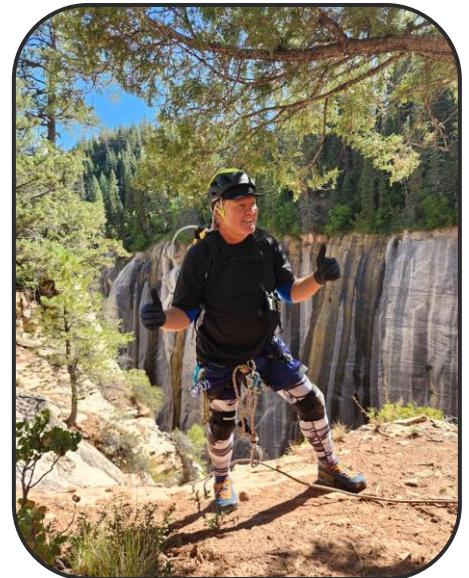


King Under the Hill



Rednecks in the Desert

MS



The Wave

The Wave is arguably the premier photographic destination in the US Southwest; located in the Coyote Buttes North area of the Utah-Arizona border.

Getting a permit for The Wave is extremely difficult, your chances are probably better being abducted by an alien named Cosmo with a hyper-gloss-bob hairdo. The success rate is around 5% (I don't know what the success rate is for alien abductions). Slim chances, because in the late summer/fall season, due to intense demand and strict quotas (only 64 people per day), it is not unusual to have 300,000 applications submitted - daily.

Somehow, we managed to win the lottery for six of us on our Canyons 2025 trip. Woo Hoo!!

A six-mile round trip hike is required to get to "The Wave". There is no trail per se, but there are good navigation instructions and random rock cairns on the slickrock. It's not bad strenuous hiking, but at the end of the journey you're ready for a rest and a cold beverage.

Over the past five years, five people have died on the way to/from The Wave. If you are unsure about your navigation skills, you should not hike alone. So... don't go wandering off chasing butterflies. Stay with your party!



Today's group consisted of, Amber, Enoch, Jake, Jeff, Melanie, and Kuenn. Again, as luck, fate, or bad karma would have it, three of the group were alternates. Attrition from a trip virus, a detached retina, and a devoted "I can't leave him behind" spouse. Amora!! 😊

IT lived up to its hype. A geological wonder of nature, time, and preservation. Most excellent! One needs to experience it, to fully appreciate it.

The trip wasn't without misfortune, drama, and serendipitous mystery.

Misfortune – there's a nasty 20 mile gravel road to navigate before arriving at the trailhead. And we managed to flatten a rear tire on our rental van. Cue the spare tire pitstop change crew in the middle of the off-roading affair.

Drama – a scene straight out of a horror movie. Sun setting in the west... unintentional abandonment of a lone hiker who became separated from the pack... coyotes howling in the distance... Well, actually no coyotes but there could have been.

Serendipitous Mystery – we stopped in the metropolis of Fredonia for gas. I was charged with filling the tank while the others went in the Maverick for snacks. Enter card and pin, select grade, insert nozzle and set for unattended fueling, then **immediately** distracted was I by a 1965 Cherry Red Chevy Nova Super Sport on a trailer in the adjacent bay. Struck up a 10-minute conversation with said owner and relived some glory days. Return to pump, it reads 27 gallons. Pump is off. We load up and resume the journey. Moments Later... Jake, "Kuenn, did you put gas in the van?". Kuenn's, insolent reply, "Yeah Jake, \$72.58". "Well, the fuel gauge is still below empty, duhde!!!"

Umm...duh...well... 😐

Kuenn Drake

-SOCIAL MEDIA CHATTER-

Chris Barton

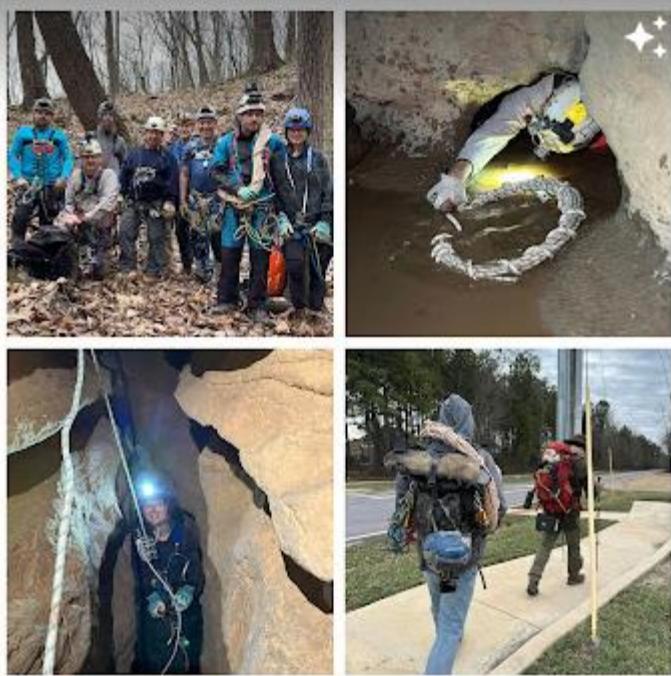
Cullman Grotto 30 year celebration with family and friends!



Chris Barton

is with **Harold Calvert** and 4 others. Cullman Grotto of the NSS trip to a multi drop in Huntsville. We had people from Montgomery and North Carolina along with the usual locals. My 13 year niece also joined us to show us all how it's done.

A great trip all around... Except the hike 😊



Kyle Fuller is with **Harold Calvert** and 6 others.

Three different pits, one weekend. Dropped 180 feet to the bottom of Natural Well.

Dropped in at night to see the glow worms light up Neversink like stars in the sky. Sorry you can't see it in a picture. Explored a huge and stunningly beautiful cave at the bottom of a 137 pit with a horrible name.



Jorge Alvarado

is with **Micah Sims**. I couldn't be more grateful for the opportunity to finally put my harness and climb! 🤘 Shout out to Micah for allowing me to come over after work ... Thanks chief for your willingness to teach me and letting me practice!!



Canyons 2025 - Cavation

De Gustibus non est Disputandum

In case you're not current on your Latin, it means, there is no disputing about tastes. Or in other words, everyone is entitled to their personal preference and choices. Now, on to the trip report.

Prologue

It had been too many years since my last trip to the southwest canyons. I had been asked repeatedly by many friends about the prospects of putting together a trip. My usual reply was, "soon".

2025 was to be it. The month of September was marked on the calendar. Feelers were sent out and interest was piqued. Now the work begins.

There's a ton of planning to do, logistics, permits, lodging, personnel – head count and limitations, travel arrangements, vehicle rentals, gear list, and on and on. It's quite extensive.

Several meetings were held, details worked out. The personnel list had the expected additions and subtractions. All part of the process. Ultimately, we were trying to keep the number of adventures to around a baker's dozen.

Personally, I enjoy this part of the process, but it doesn't come without some pain and headaches. Always the concern of not offending. I think we did a pretty good job on that score.

Preparations were drawing to a close, the departure date was near. Prep included some PT, but as has been said before, when you get out there, and it's a long day, and you're dragging your tail, you'll wish you had trained harder.

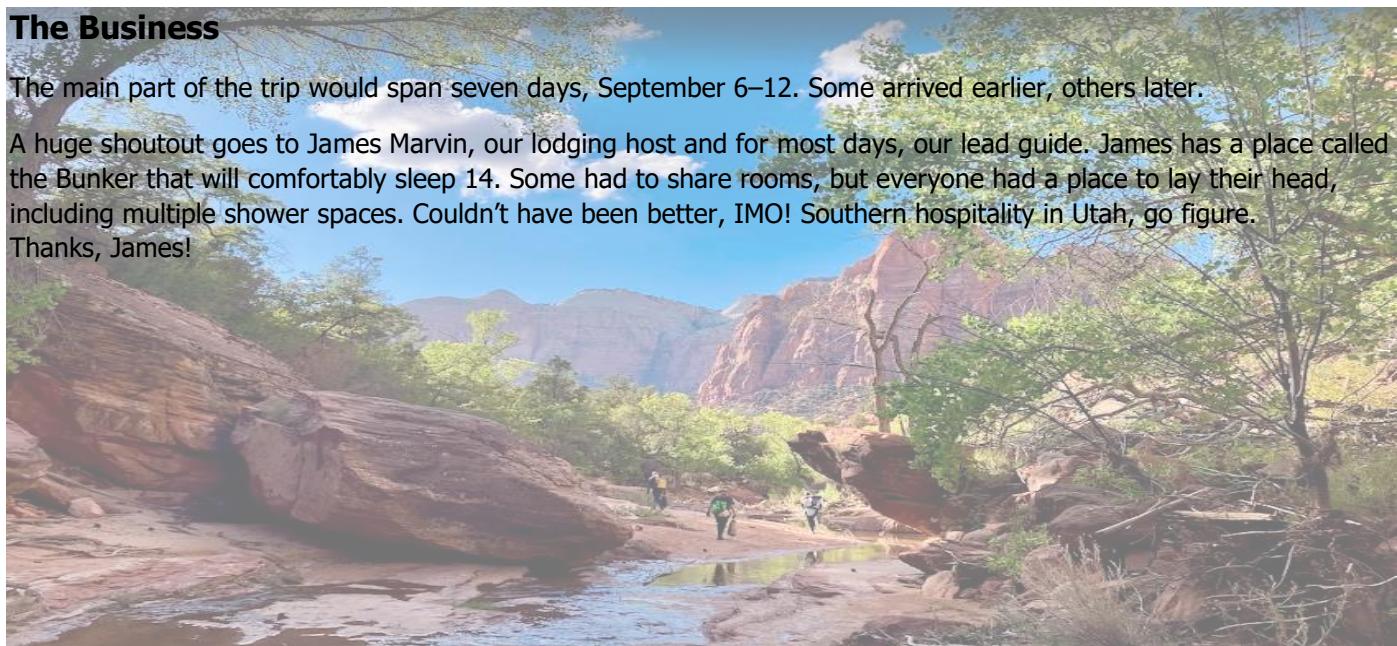
The biggest pre-trip disappointment occurred just days before the scheduled departure. Perry and Sharon Clayton were on the attendees list for the trip, all set to go. Then, I receive a call from Perry, early one morning, which was unusual, typically we are text communicators.

He said coming home from work yesterday I had about 50% vision in one eye. He described it as like the shutter of a camera half closed. He knew he had to get it seen about. The next day he reported that it was not good news. Retina damage that needed immediate attention and repair. The surgery would exclude him from altitudes and vigorous exercise. Sharon's tough decision, go or chose to stay home and be a care giver. That was a bummer for them, all around!

The Business

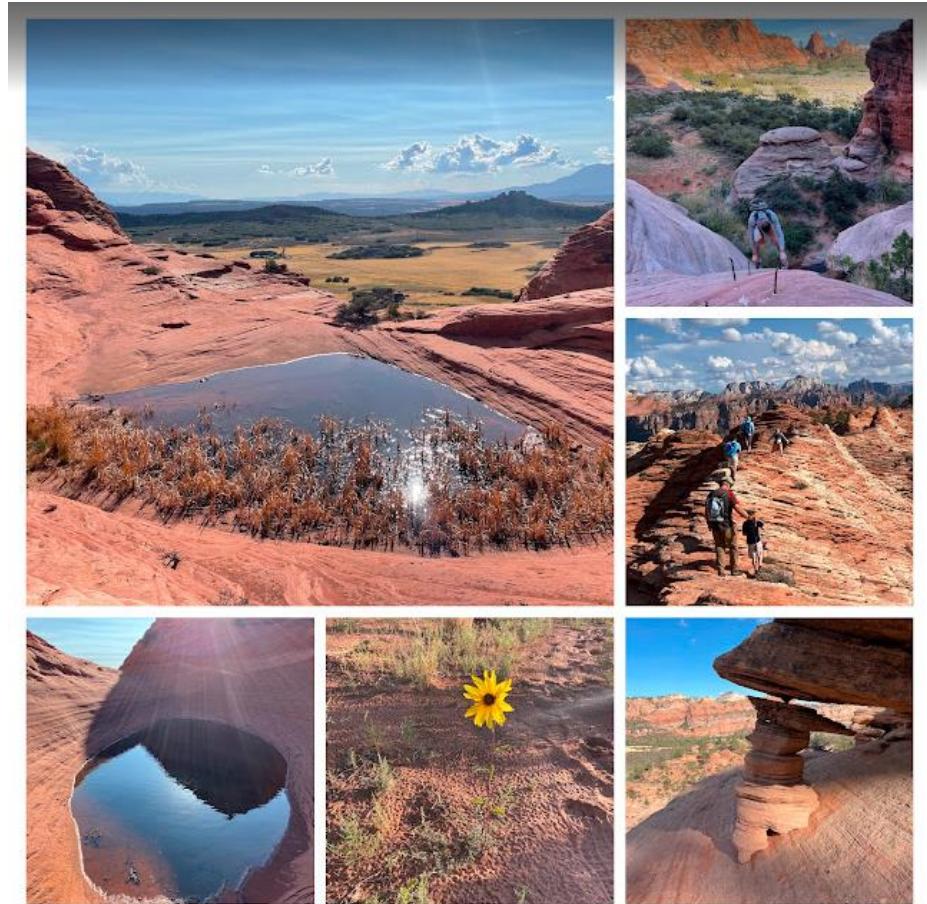
The main part of the trip would span seven days, September 6–12. Some arrived earlier, others later.

A huge shoutout goes to James Marvin, our lodging host and for most days, our lead guide. James has a place called the Bunker that will comfortably sleep 14. Some had to share rooms, but everyone had a place to lay their head, including multiple shower spaces. Couldn't have been better, IMO! Southern hospitality in Utah, go figure. Thanks, James!



Saturday 6th

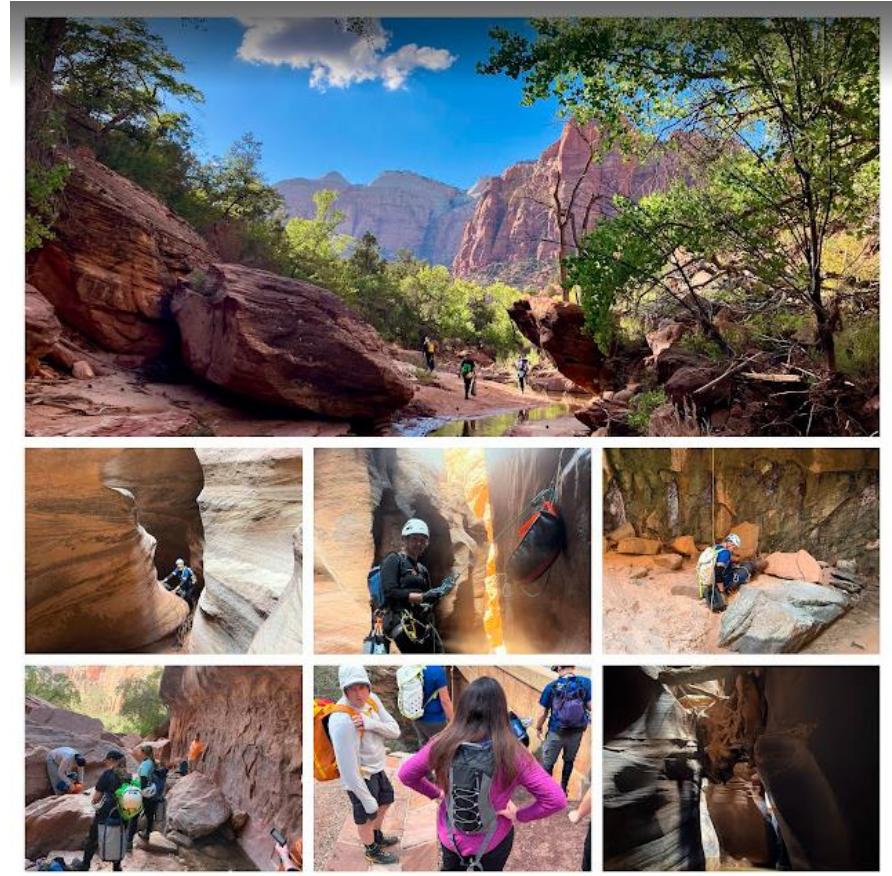
James leads those of us that had arrived on a hike in the Kolob Terrace area. It was an enjoyable hike, no walk in the park, for sure. He educated us on the geological features and basic lay of the land. It's a fav hike for him as well. One in which he had invested some time, evidence by iron loop rungs in certain sketchy areas, eliminating the need for ropes. A fantastic first day introduction adventure!

**Sunday 7th - Pine Creek Canyon**

There are a few canyons in ZNP that will allow more than six canyoneers. PC is one of them. Group size maximum is 12. We labeled this day Canyoneering 101. For many it would be their first taste of technical canyoneering.

Pine Creek has the easiest technical canyon entry in ZNP and a not so easy exit. But it's all in the days work. Everyone did well...well most everyone.

The water was cold, yeah cold. After Jamie's initial baptism by ice-water pothole, she decided that canyoneering was not her "thang". So, she and Micah made a not so quick, but safe exit. After a brief delay, the rest of us ventured on. Lots of laughs, catching your breath from the icy water, and searching for that elusive ray of sunlight to momentarily thaw out before the next plunge.



Monday 8th

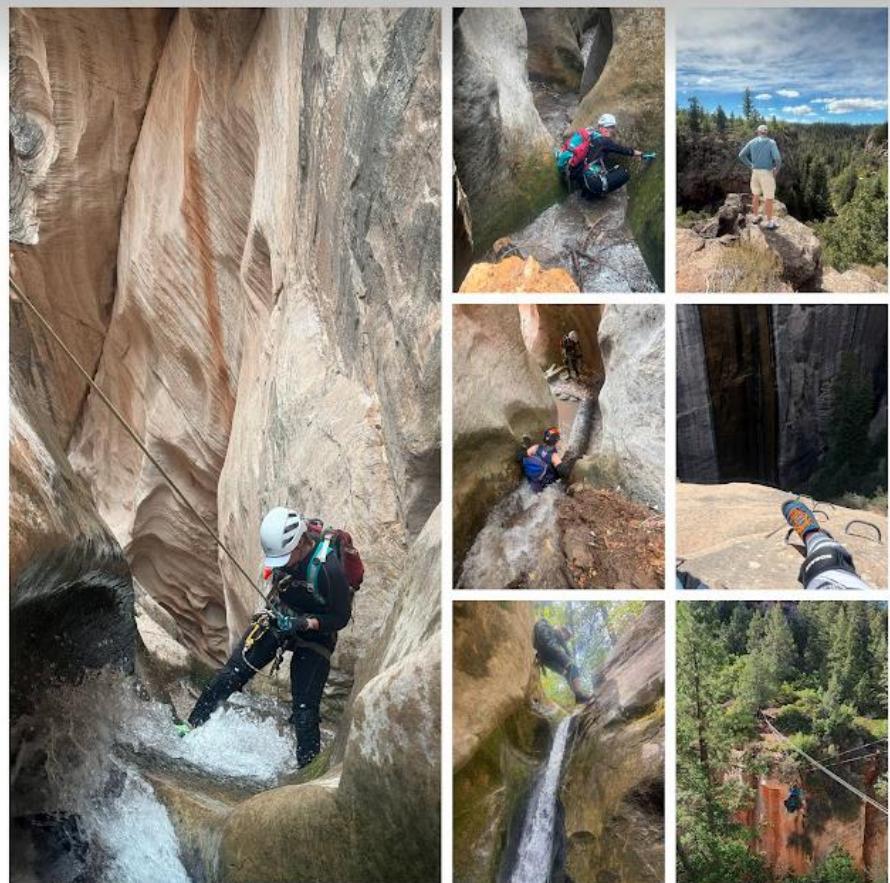
This was the first day for splitting up the group. We had secured a permit for Mystery Canyon, which is an outstanding canyon. For many canyoneers it's their most favorite canyon in ZNP.

I provided shuttle and while the others were in the canyon, several of us did some sightseeing and eventual rendezvous at the exit point for the Mystery folks. They made really good time.

At the exit of Mystery, the rendezvous point and shuttle stop is called the Temple of Sinawava. While we were waiting for our canyoneers to arrive we managed to catch the tail end of a SAR rescue.

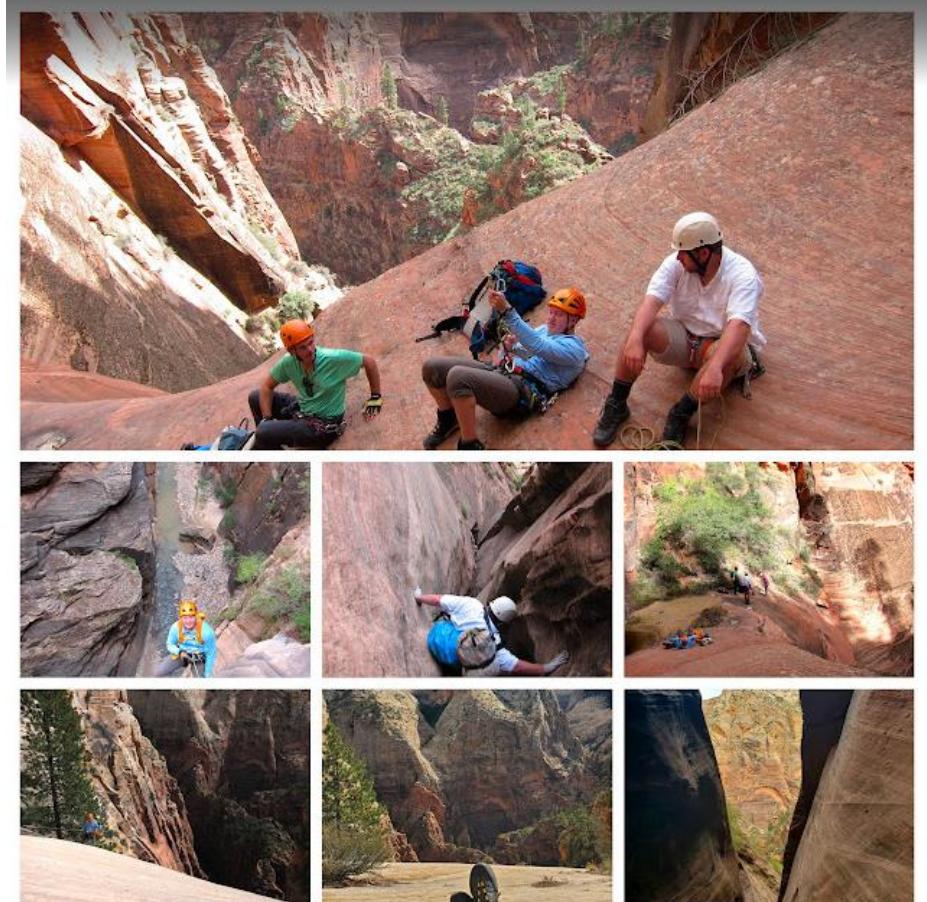
**Tuesday 9th**

Some of the group would go on a strenuous adventure through Not Imlay canyon. While others of us would get a taste of Eye of the Needle – via ferrata (Italian for “iron path”). This was a canyon I had not done before and it totally made the trip for me!



Tuesday 9th (continued)

A few pictures from the Not Imlay canyon team.



Wednesday 10th

The Wave and Bryce Canyon.



Thursday 11th

This day we were all back together (mostly). And an epic day it would be, for many of us. It was back in the Kolob Terrace section of the park, which includes the Left Fork river, often referred to as the Subway, but there's really a lot more there that most people don't see. We hiked up to the head of the canyon, practically, and dropped in along a steep scree section into Upper Left Fork technical canyon. Then Das boot. Then Subway. And a lengthy hike down, out, and up to the lower parking area. A sizeable trip of approximately 14 miles.

A few mistakes were made this day, and they would come back to haunt us later. It started out with an unrealistic exit time given to our shuttle girl for the day, Jamie. And we missed it bad, by a couple of hours for a few, and by several hours for others. Unfortunately, this sent Jamie into wholesale panic mode, call SAR.

Back to the narrative. It was a beautiful day and a day of extremes. Our most elevation change day - our most rappels - Our longest hike day - And a boat load of exhaustion.

About mid-day, looking at the time and knowing the miles to go (James and I were the only two that really had a sense for that) I realized that it was going to be a night exit. Something you would like to avoid in ZNP. So, trying to provide options for the group I suggested a midway bail of the route, for those who had had enough. We were about six hours in, and I knew there were easily that many more hours to go. I did however, misjudged the exit time at this juncture by several hours, which sadly put us being the last group to get out.

The rest of the group completed the planned route for the day. But they also exited in the dark.

It was a tough day for everyone! For me, it was an ultra-dehydration, puke your guts out, and leave him for dead, day. Later when we finally arrived back at the bunker, at the behest of my partners, I ended up in the hospital for a 2 1/2 bag IV cocktail. WooHoo! Party time for me!

There was a funny story that occurred at the hospital, but I'll save that for another time. (If you've read this far you're dying for closure.) I do appreciate my caregivers that late-night wee-morning hours evac, Andrew, Melanie, and Enoch. Thank y'all!

Friday the group split up with the Sims family heading to Las Vegas. A few of the group, that wasn't on the first trip, went back to Eye of the Needle with James. While the rest of us kind of just toolled around, did some sightseeing and ventured up to Mount Carmel to drop in at Imlay Gear for a nice visit with Tom Jones, aka Ratagonia. It was an enjoyable downtime day.

Epilogue

I think for some in the group, this was a one-and-done adventure. Maybe for a few, even, don't want to go back there ever again, adventure.

For me, it's a place of refuge from the noise of the world. An intense contrast of beauty and physical extremes. A place to make new friends and endear the old ones.

I began with Latin, I'll conclude with Espanol.

Lo que das te Vuelve

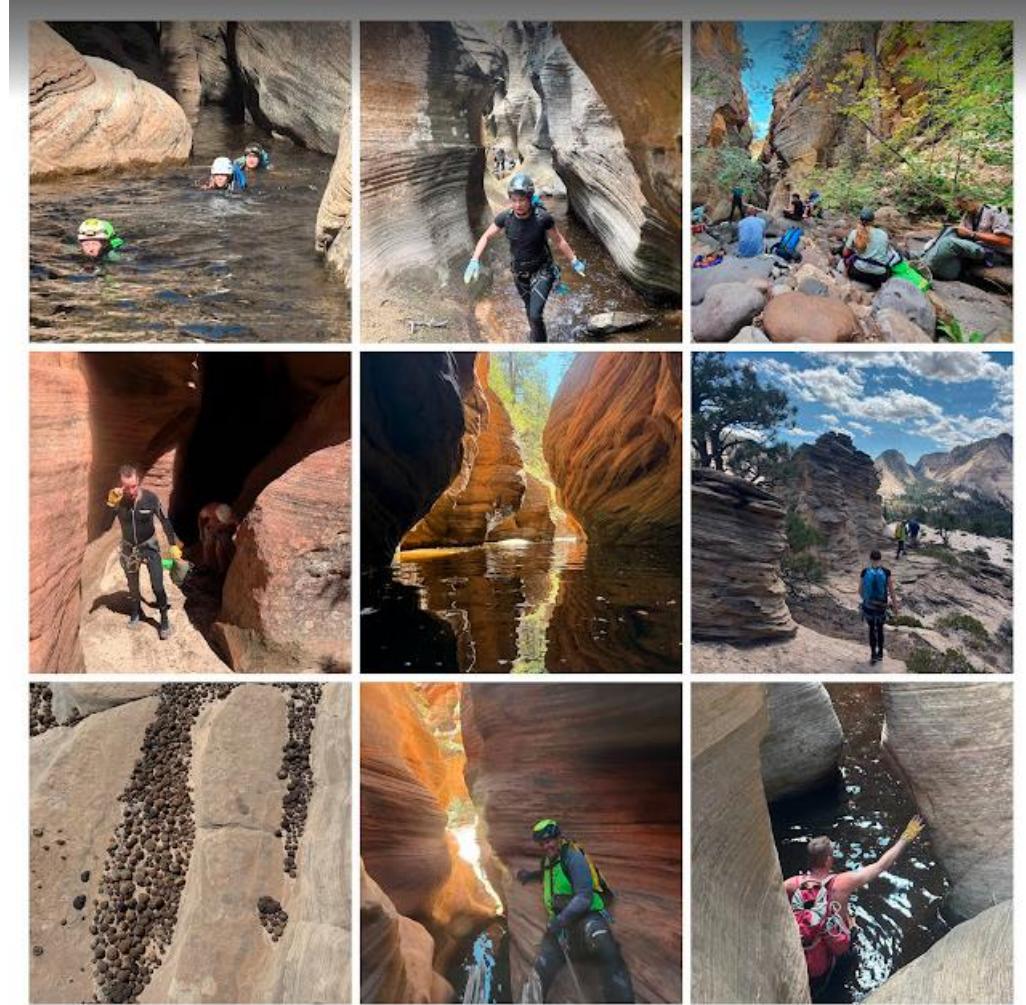
Translation, what you give comes back to you. Or, you get out of something what you've invested in it.

Buena por ahora, pero quiero más.

Kuenn Drake



Thursday 11th Picture Collage



Friday 12th Decompress Days

And a few more Eye of the Needle

