

JULY 2019

Due to the elapsed time between these events, and me writing this log some events maybe be slightly inaccurate.

FRIDAY 26/7

I left work around 1500 with Erin picking me up in the already packed car. We bolted out of Denver as fast as one can on a Friday afternoon, heading up US-6 and joining I-70 just before Idaho Springs. For some reason I-70 was extra slow today and that delayed us significantly. We ate in the Wendy's in Eagle around 1830 1/, and then pushed up the rutted dirt backroads to the campsite in the White River National Forest, near the Harry Gate's Hut. I was dubious about our ability to get up to the site because of the state of the road in places. Hunters in big 4x4s like to tear the road to shreds during the hunting season. When we made it up to camp and got settled we heard from people arriving late that I-70 Westbound was now closed due to a landslide, and they were detoured.

SATURDAY 27/7

We rose early in the morning and a group of us walked up to Sinking River and Apline Twister. We waited there for Jeff to rig Sinking River and then he and another few intended to head on up to Apline Twister. Sinking River is the deepest single pitch in Colorado at 169' (51 metres) and reminded me of both Pigeon Pot II and Poll Elbha. Due to the nature of the pot we could only go one at a time.

So I descended down past someone's tattered old jeans which acted as a rope pad, and into the mist from the waterfall. Upon reaching the ledge about 18" about the plunge pool I stood for a minute or two to take in the sight and then made a swift ascent to the warmth of the summer sun above. The SRT was a welcome refresher for what the next day held in store.

After resurfacing and getting changed, myself Erin and Harrison walked a mile or so up the mountain to Alpine Twister where Jeff had taken another group. After a relatively brief snack break while the exiting group got changed Jeff, Erin, Harrison, Ben, and I headed into the cave, which I would describe as a great fresher's cave when you want to make them crawl. It was a short cave only taking about 30-40 minutes to complete. Most of the journey was crawling in passage that was between one and two feet tall. These passages were punctuated with small rooms where one could relax for the briefs of moments to let the caver

1/ Where the lad behind the counter spelt my name "Owan" and here was me thinking I'd seen it all.



Figure 1: The area near Apline Twister

ahead gain a little more ground. At the end of the cave we dropped into a small stream passage where one can see the stream (consisting nearly entirely of snow melt) disappear down a hands and knees passage. I did hop into the stream and peak down the passage before rejoining my colleagues who were more accustomed to dry caving.

When we exited the cave we were greeted by the brilliant Colorado summer sun, which made both changing clothes and the three mile hike back to camp very enjoyable. When we returned to camp and had some lunch a group of us ^{2/} decided to head out to Crystal Ice Palace in the woods on the other side of camp. This is a cave that I wish I had photos of, we descended into a ravine filled with snow pack (in July) and at one end of the ravine was the cave which contained a short icy pitch into the cave itself. We were lucky that Crystal Ice Palace was accessible because frequently the entrance is blocked with an ice plug! As one could imagine the cave was rather chilly and I was glad that I had worn my Levi's under my oversuit. Unfortunately we couldn't go very far into the cave as we hadn't got enough rope to aid our climb out. Also the sound make when the rope moved around as a caver SRT-ed up it, gave me some impression as to what it must be like to be in a chandelier while it is smashed to pieces.

^{2/} Thinking back on it as I write this I wonder why so many people came along for the walk as only 4 of us went into the cave.

SUNDAY 28/7

On Sunday morning we were outside Herbie's Deli by around 0930 or 1000. It's entrance reminded me of Poll na Graí, except without the flowing water and with a sheet of ice in the bottom. I had been welcomed along on this trip because the SRT work in the cave is tight and technical ^{3/}, on top of this being an Irish caver I was used to the cold, the wet, and the misery of both. Herbie's wasn't a very big cave but with the SRT it took us about an hour to ninety minutes to get to the dig site. When I reached the bottom of the final pitch I saw Jeff had disappeared ahead, and Carl was hauling a turkey pan back with a rope. I found out that they were bailing out the "bath tub", a nearly flat out crawl through icy melt water. The digging itself was unremarkable on this trip we made I think about 10' of progress in 4 hours of digging. The most interesting thing was that at the "new" face of the dig a yellow deposit was found, and I believe it was thought to be elemental sulphur. This was my first time digging, and I must admit I really did enjoy it. The four of us set up a great bucket line for hauling muck up and out of the dig site. I probably over did my first day digging as my mood was fouling by the time I reached the surface. While the SRT was not difficult, the ascent was just long after the digging. 10/10 would return to Herbie's Deli.

3/ The cave was rigged with an interesting combination of American and Apline techniques.