

Sand Cave

By Luke Fuka

On the morning of January 3, 2023 our journey including Luke Anderson, Jakob, Josh and I (Luke Fuka) began our journey to Sand cave. We traveled north of Carlsbad across increasingly treacherous roads until summiting McKittrick Hill. Despite my GPS app rating the roads for two-wheel drive, we barely made it up in Jakob's Ford Escape. Upon cresting the hill, we had significant difficulty getting our bearings due the markings of Azotea Peak and



McKittrick Hill on the BLM supplied map not corresponding to the peaks labeled on our GPS. Due to this, when attempting to locate the cave we first found the entrances to both Little Sand Cave and Endless Cave instead. We reevaluated the map and cross referenced our GPS and then drove a bit further along the peak until we found another fence ladder. We then scouted the area and were able to find the lower entrance to Sand Cave, but we were unable to locate the upper entrance. We packed our things and brought our equipment down to the cave entrance so that we could avoid changing into our caving clothes on top of the windy peak and then descended into the cave.



Inside the cave we found the map for the cave was highly confusing due to the many levels of the cave. We explored using the map as light reference and noting the way we had traveled so we could ensure a safe exit. We made our way through the sand room to the flowstone pit and soon enough we stumbled across the lily pad room, which filled me with excitement because I had recognized it from the pictures a fellow caver and former Aggie Grotto president had taken 4 years ago! Based on this

recognition, I was able to orient and understand the map better. We then made our way to the wet room where we signed the cave registrar and noticed my good friend Bailey Ohlson's signature from 2018, which put quite a smile on my face! We then navigated to the sand room and then towards the upper entrance, where I scaled the walls and dropped a point on my GPS so we could



locate it once we exited the cave and take a look at it. After this we traveled to the dome room where we looked over the 40ft drop down below. While we were here the 4 of us sung "The Lion Sleeps Tonight" as a barbershop quartet because we noticed the acoustics as well as our position from where we observed the room was quite unique. Time was running thin and dusk was approaching so we then navigated towards the lower entrance and made our way out, while still taking a good amount of time to admire the beauty of the numerous formations in the cave.

During our trip to New Mexico this was probably one of the best caves we got to visit. The lily pad room was filled with beautiful (but sharp) shelf stone as well as many fascinating helictites. Our time in the cave lasted 4 hours, however we left much to see due to our difficulty with the map.