

Celebrating Earth Science Week, I'm Lewis Land, of the New Mexico Bureau of Geology and Mineral Resources. In the late 70s I lived in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and I badly wanted new stereo equipment. I decided that college might lead to a better-paying job that would allow me to upgrade my stereo system. I knew nothing about geology except that a friend had recently gotten his BS in the field. He had his own house and a decent stereo, so it seemed like a reasonable career path.

I graduated in 1981 near the end of the last big oil boom, and went to work for a company in Oklahoma City. It was a pretty wild ride through boom and bust times, but I thoroughly enjoyed my work in the petroleum industry. As an exploration geologist, I could do geology on a very large scale, including mapping entire sedimentary basins. But eventually my employer tired of my presence, so I returned to school to work on a Masters Degree.

Unfortunately, by the time I graduated the industry had deteriorated further. With no jobs available in the petroleum sector I took a PhD research fellowship at the University of North Carolina, deciding to refocus my career on groundwater. My advisor suggested I investigate submarine groundwater discharge from the Atlantic continental margin and the karst features that might result. My PhD program, although rather stressful, was very exciting, including several submersible dives mapping sinkholes in the Straits of Florida. After graduation in 1999 I went to work for the North Carolina Division of Water Resources and spent a year and a half conducting geophysical surveys across the coastal plain.

I now work for the New Mexico Bureau of Geology, which also involves working with the National Cave and Karst Research Institute in Carlsbad, where I currently live. My research focuses on karstic aquifers in southern New Mexico, and conducting geophysical investigations of caves and sinkholes.

I think being a geologist is one of the most interesting career paths I could possibly have lucked into. In spite of the ups and downs, I've never been bored.