

Beginner's Information

Safety First!

Disclaimer: Caving is an inherently hazardous activity, with bruises and twisted ankles being common injuries. Broken bones, concussions, entrapment, disabling injuries, and deaths have been known to occur during caving trips. This information is not a substitute for instruction, experience, or personal responsibility.

Caving can be physically and emotionally demanding and stressful. It is important that you are prepared, fit, properly equipped, sober, and healthy.

We strongly recommend that beginners cave with and be led by experienced, knowledgeable cavers. Cavers need to understand their personal skill level and the difficulty of the cave being visited -- it is your responsibility to not exceed your abilities and skill levels. Inform your trip leader and companions of any situations or conditions that may limit your abilities and capabilities.

Average cave temperatures are near 55 degrees with humidity of 100%. Dressing in layers of synthetic insulating clothing can help protect cavers from the constant hazard of hypothermia.

Cave Conservation

Caves are very fragile, it is illegal to damage or remove formations or anything else from the inside of a cave. Formations will not grow back for thousands of years. Many animals that you may see in a cave are also protected by law and should not be disturbed.

Most caves do not clean themselves, trash, paint, human waste, food crumbs will all remain in a cave for a very long time and impact the cave environment. Always pack out everything you take into the cave.

Essential Equipment:

- **UIAA certified Climbing Helmet** (these are available from the grotto.)
- **Electric headlamp** (these are available from the grotto) Bring your own fresh, new "AA" batteries as well as backups. LED lamps extend battery life.
- **Two backup light sources** - small flashlights or headlamps work well. Bring extra batteries. All together, you should have THREE sources of light bright enough to exit the cave and two of the light sources need to be helmet mounted.
- **Old rugged clothing.** Sturdy synthetic clothing is strongly recommended for warmth when wet. Synthetic coveralls are preferred by many cavers as they don't come untucked. No Tyvek or disposable garments allowed. Check with your trip leader regarding cave conditions so you can choose suitable clothing. Consider the outside conditions - will you be hiking 2 miles in 10 degree weather? Will you be scrambling up long hills in 95 degree weather?
- **Thermal layering underwear.** Synthetic or wool underlayers, fleece for cold caves or if you get cold easily. NO COTTON - it provides no warmth if you get wet, and wet cotton makes you very vulnerable to hypothermia - the saying is that "cotton kills!" Bring an extra synthetic or wool top - fleece perhaps - in case the trip is colder than you anticipated.

- **Synthetic warm socks.**
- **Sturdy boots** - good fitting boots with good lugged sole and ankle protection are essential. Sturdy boots help prevent ankle sprains and good treads give you more secure footing. Boots are likely to get very wet and will wear quickly - many cavers use work boots from discount stores. *NO SNEAKERS.*
- **Sturdy work gloves** - leather work, Nitrile or latex coated knit gloves are good. Bring synthetic (polypro) glove liners if you get cold hands. Some people prefer rubberized work gloves for wet caves.
- **Small backpack or fannypack.** Keep your hands free.
- **Water** - bring 1 liter of water or more.
- **Food** - High energy/non crushable snacks, energy bars, granola, trail mix. Bring extra in case the trip runs longer than planned.
- **Plastic garbage bag** - can be used as a heat tent for an in-cave emergency, and holds your wet dirty caving gear after the trip.
- **Small First Aid Kit** - be able to manage blisters, headaches, loose bowels, small cuts, dirt in your contact lenses, etc. Any personal medications such as inhaler or epi pens should be in a crush proof / waterproof container. Let trip leader know you have them. Coordinate with your trip leader to ensure that the group has the resources necessary to handle larger problems.
- **Knee and Elbow pads** - highly recommended! You will be crawling and scrambling over rocks.
- **Change of clothes** - clean clothes to change into after the trip

Optional Equipment:

- 1" climbers webbing - 30 feet or so - many possible uses in-cave
- Cave map and compass
- Watch (kept in a container inside your pack)
- Whistle
- Camera

DO NOT bring anything into a cave that you do not wish to get wet or mud covered. Cave mud is very difficult to remove and will not wash completely out of most fabrics. **DO** bring a garbage bag to hold your dirty caving clothes in for the ride home.

White Nose Syndrome Decontamination Procedures

The Department of Environmental Conservation is asking that cavers please follow these procedures for decontamination. At this point this is only a request but the caving community can help in the effort to hopefully control this mysterious White Nose Syndrome. We are doing this to prevent what could be a continent wide spread of a previously unidentified pathogen to all caves and mines, and all our cave dwelling bat populations in the east. We do not yet know what is happening, or why, but it could be extremely serious, and we have to assume that it is until we can prove otherwise.

1. Remove your caving gear when you get to the vehicle and put it in a closed plastic bag to prevent contamination of the trunk.
2. Wash caving clothes using hot water, detergent and a normal bleach cycle.
3. Dry the clothes thoroughly and dry them at hot temperatures.
4. Scrape the dirt from boots and soak them in a bleach solution -porous boots longer than nonporous boots. (could find no specified periods for soaking).
5. Do not forget cave packs or helmets/ (lights)
6. Sunlight can also kill many things that live in dark places.