

SAFE CAVING PRACTICES

Gear, Clean-up, and Safety

For GEAR:

1. Carry along some extra energy food and drinking water into the cave. Hard candy, tootsie rolls and such high sugar content foods are good.
2. If using a carbide light, use steel or plastic containers for safety. Carry a lamp repair kit and extra parts.
3. At least two light sources (3 are better) should be taken - flashlights, candles, carbide, and electric lights are good. Flashlights should have fresh batteries. Extra batteries and bulb are not another light source. In some areas of the country gasoline lanterns are used, but should not be used in tight crawl ways.
4. A safety helmet (hard hat) is a must. Gloves, sturdy shoes, and coveralls are good. Clothing should not have parts that will snag. Wear long johns under your clothing to ward off the cold - wool/polyester blend is especially good. (Wool keeps you warm when it is wet - you may get wet from sweating, pools of water, or an underground stream.)
5. A small tote bag with strap can be used to carry gear.
6. A personal first aid kit is good to have. (A few band aids may suffice.)
7. If you wear glasses, wear old glasses and glasses' guards. An extra pair in the car could prove helpful.
8. Bring some large plastic bags for muddy caving clothes; you will not want to wear your muddy caving clothes home.
9. Bring a complete change of clothes including another pair of shoes for the trip home. No one wants a muddy caver in his or her car!!!!
10. A map and compass may be desirable.

For CLEAN-UP:

1. Don't bring or wear anything that you want fully clean again.
2. Soak or hose clothes to remove mud. As much mud as possible should be removed before using a washing machine.
3. After using the washing machine thoroughly rinse the machine with clean water; so that, the next batch of clothes will not pick up any remaining mud residue.
4. Leather boots should be waterproofed before the trip to aid mud removal. Scrape off mud, let boots dry naturally, and then re-waterproof with mink oil, etc.
5. Store caving clothes outside your house as cave cricket eggs can hatch from your caving clothes and can cause all manners of inconvenience if left inside your house.

For SAFETY:

1. Safety first.
2. Never explore a cave alone; four persons should be a minimum.
3. When going caving, always leave word of where you are going, when you will return, and who to call in the event of an emergency. Plan accordingly and do not be late returning.
4. Safety is most important inasmuch as an injured person is often evacuated from a cave only with difficulty.
5. Never overextend yourself or another person in a cave. Overtired or frightened people cause accidents.
6. Care should be taken not to loosen rocks while caving; a dislodged falling rock can cause injury. If you loosen a rock, yell, "ROCK"; so that, the people below you may seek cover. The same goes for any falling object including dirt.
7. Rope work and other mountaineering techniques must always be learned and perfected above ground before being attempted in caves.
8. Never cave if you have some illness that might render you temporarily helpless or irrational.
9. Caving is not a sport for recklessness; show-offs are seldom appreciated.
10. If height, darkness or tight, closed spaces disturb you, don't cave. (A test: sit in the bottom of a dark, closed closet and if this environment bothers you, do not go caving.)
11. If you lack equipment, ask. You can probably borrow some.
12. You are the guest of the landowner. Always ask permission to use his property. Be courteous. Close all gates that you open; don't litter or dump carbide (it is poisonous to people and livestock). Remember, one inconsiderate caver can close a cave to all others.
13. Bats disturbed from winter hibernation may die and in some cases may be come extinct species. If you encounter a bat, give it room; so that, it may leave your area uninjured.
14. In summer, be aware that snakes can be in and around cave entrances. Snakes may hibernate in these areas in winter.
15. Each person is not only responsible for themselves, but also for the person in front of and behind them.
16. If a cave owner denies you permission to use his property, respect his wishes and go on to the next cave.
17. Use dump bags for spent carbide; recharge lanterns in groups.
18. As you travel through the cave, turn around and look behind you often (every two steps, if necessary). A cave looks entirely different from the opposite direction. If you fear getting lost, place objects at all junctions. DO NOT MARK CAVE WALLS; THIS DEFACTS THE CAVE. Reflective arrows are good markers; place them pointing the way out; and the last person in the group should pick them up on their way out.

19. Don't take anything into the cave that you can't afford to lose, such as car keys, wallets, etc. The clothing you will wear should not be anything that you want to get clean again.
20. Defacing a cave and selling cave artifacts is illegal in many states. Cave formations do not live, grow, or have their cave appearance and luster if removed from the cave environment. It takes thousands of years for caves to form; please, be considerate of future generations.
21. Good cavers pick up any trash they find in the cave and carry out their own. They practice conservation. The National Speleological Society (NSS) sums up this practice in a brief motto: TAKE NOTHING BUT PICTURES, LEAVE NOTHING BUT FOOTPRINTS, KILL NOTHING BUT TIME.
22. Contact and association with a local chapter, a Grotto, of the NSS is a good way to learn safe caving, meet other cavers, and to learn of other caving activities.
23. Do not tell others the location of your favorite caves lest vandals will locate them and caving there will be ruined for all. Discretion can be a good part of ego.

References:

Description of Tennessee Caves by Larry E. Matthews
Caves of Tennessee by Thomas C. Barr, Jr.
Caves of Maryland by Richard Franz and Dennis Slifer
Suggestions:
from Arthur W. Dodds, Jr. and Herbert J. Alleman
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