

Hints & Suggestions for Caving

SAFETY

1. Dress for the conditions. Caves in the Washington, DC area are cold (about 50-55° F), wet and muddy - perfect conditions for hypothermia!
2. Carry three sources of light. Many cavers take a flashlight and a candle (with matches) in addition to their main lamp.
3. Stay together in the cave. If you want to look at a formation or crawl into a hole, tell the others so they won't leave you behind.
4. Don't run or jump in the cave. The floor is seldom level and often has loose rocks and holes that can lead to sprained ankles or broken legs.
5. If you don't want to do something, let the trip leaders know! Nobody has to do anything that makes them feel uncomfortable. Trip leaders hate to have to rescue somebody who gets in over his head!

CONSERVATION

1. Caves are very sensitive and easily damaged. Be extremely careful not to break formations. Even fingerprints can ruin some formations.
2. Do not bother the cave animals, especially bats. Small pools sometimes have isopods or other animals that can be disturbed by stirring up the mud.
3. Take out everything that you took into the cave but do not take out anything that you find there (except trash).

CLOTHING

1. Old clothes (ones that you wouldn't mind throwing away after the trip). Some cavers prefer to wear heavy weight pants and shirts, others wear coveralls over lighter clothing.
2. Comfortable, loose-fitting, long pants (wool is best, army fatigues or hiking pants are good, jeans are not recommended).
3. Heavy, long sleeve shirt (wool is best, but any work shirt will do).
4. High-top boots with non-slip soles are recommended. Combat or work boots are good and not too expensive. Sneakers are acceptable if nothing else is available, but they do not provide good ankle support, usually slip and slide on muddy slopes and are not very warm.
5. Warm underwear. Cotton is OK for short trips but is not nearly as warm as polypropylene. Don't forget wool or polypropylene socks, especially if you plan to wear sneakers.
6. Inexpensive cotton garden gloves are recommended for protection against sharp rocks.
7. A complete change of clothing (including underwear) to wear on the way home - most people won't let you into their car until you've changed!

EQUIPMENT

1. Helmet and primary light. A climbing type helmet is best, but construction hard hats are better than nothing. The primary light (usually electric) should be mounted on the helmet so your hands are free for climbing or crawling.
2. Secondary light, usually a flashlight with good batteries and bulb. Experienced cavers also carry spare batteries and bulbs.
3. Third source of light. A candle is good because it can also be used as a heat source. Don't forget to take matches and be sure to pack them in a waterproof container.
4. Small pack (an inexpensive fanny pack or book bag is very good). Experienced cavers have their own cave packs, but for a beginners trip several people can share one pack.
5. First aid kits. Plan on carrying a small first aid kit in each cave pack and leaving a larger kit in the car.
6. Large plastic garbage bag. Useful for keeping warm in the cave if you have to sit for a long time and also good for carrying home the dirty clothes. Keep it in your helmet so it's always with you.

FOOD

1. Energy food. Hard candy or candy bars are good, but don't bring a lot - you won't have much time to eat while you're in the cave.
2. Water. A canteen or water bottle should be enough for several people, so you can plan to put one in each cave pack.