

THE NEAR NORMAL NEWS



THE NEAR NORMAL NEWS is published by the:

Near Normal Grotto #363,
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ARTICLE SUBMISSION INFO

We accept most cave-related submissions. Equipment reviews, scientific articles, trip reports, announcements, cartoons, artwork, and pictures are all welcome. Most submissions must be received by the last Friday of the month prior to publication. Scientific submissions need extra time for review.

Send submissions, using the guidelines below, to Jeffery Gosnell at gosnell@greatoakscamp.org. Submissions on disk may be mailed to 1384 County Road 900N, Lacon, IL 61540.

Photographic & graphic submissions should generally be in JPEG format. Query the editor if your submission uses a different program. Photographs should list the cave, general location (ex. Southern Illinois, or Washington Co, IN.), names of any persons included in the photo, and name of the photographer.

Written submissions may be sent as an attachment using Microsoft Works®, Microsoft Word®, or plain ASCII (DOS-text), or incorporated directly into an e-mailed text message. If you are uncomfortable with your writing ability, simply put together a basic account of the trip—ignoring spelling, grammar, and punctuation—and request the editor to help draft the finished product.

Scientific and Technical articles are expected to be of a high standard, citing evidence of statements and crediting references, where appropriate.

The Near Normal Grotto

The Near Normal Grotto meets the second Friday of each month at 7 P.M. in the Community Room of

National City Bank
202 E. Washington
Bloomington, IL.

Adverse weather, holidays, and our annual September picnic may affect meeting times.

2004 Executive Committee:

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<http://oldsci.eiu.edu/physics/len/grotto/nng.htm>

The Near Normal Grotto is part of the **National Speleological Society** (NSS). We encourage all persons interested in caving to join the NSS. Membership is \$35/year. Members receive the *NSS News* (monthly) and other caving publications.

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www.caves.org

On The Cover:

Cave Owner Dan Owsley squeezes out of Lost Bovine Cave in Washington County, IN. Photo by Troy J. Simpson.

Near Normal Grotto Business

Minutes from January 2004 Meeting:
Meeting called to order 7:23.

Present: Julie Angel, Beth Reinke, Dave, Angie, Matthew & Justin Carson, Larry Bird, John Schirle, Jeffery Gosnell, Ralph Sawyer, Don Kerouac & Marc Tiritilli.

Minutes were approved as written in the latest issue of the *Near Normal News*.

Old Business

- The logistics & cost of printing the Near Normal News was discussed. For the January news, Jeffery Gosnell edited & drafted it into a PDF file and emailed it to John Schirle, who is able to print it in color at cost. This was a trial run, to see, not only if we liked the output, but also if costs would still be within our budget. To compare costs, the Sept. 2003 issue was printed for \$1.26/copy in black & white. The January color issue was \$1.43/copy. Beth moved that we continue to print using this system with a reasonable amount of color pictures per issue, & re-evaluate as needed in the future. All in favor.

- Feb. 28-29, Ralph Sawyer is planning a trip to Sullivans. There will be two trips, a wet-suit one and dryer one. Those wanting to do the wet-suit trip should plan to come on Friday night so they can get an early start. Anyone interested should contact Ralph.

- For those interested, Marc reported that Midwest Diving Specialists in Peoria will have wetsuits on sale in February. He'll check on the dates for that.

- Marc asked us to be sure we have current contact information (especially emails) for everyone in the grotto. When announcing coming events, we want to be sure no one is left "out of the loop". [Acting Secretary's note: Be sure Dave Carson has your current information: thecarsons@triangleret.net.]

New Business

- Marc Tiritilli is hoping to lead a TAG trip sometime after April 15. The trip would combine both vertical and horizontal caving.

- The ISS is sponsoring a Shawnee National Forest project weekend, Jan. 31.

- June 19-26 is cave rescue training in Corydon, Indiana. Marc recommends it as a great way to improve your skills in rescue and caving in general. Contact him for more information.

- In the past we've had a Program Committee that arranged the programs to follow our meeting each month. We need new volunteers to take charge. Ralph volunteered to lead February's program on caving first aid kits.

Trip Reports

A group went to Cave River Valley, did a through-trip of Lamplighters, and poked around some other holes in the area. It was cold, wet, snowy and fun.

Next meeting will be February 13.

Meeting adjourn at 8:18 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, John Schirle, VP



Minutes from February 2004 Meeting:

Meeting called to order at 7:20pm.

Present: David Carson, Rick Delay, Jim Jacobs, Don Kerouac, Nathan Marcier, John Moritz, Bill Morrow, Ralph Sawyer, Amy & Troy Simpson, Marc Tiritilli

Reports

- Troy gave the Secretary's Report, with the January minutes accepted (motion by Don, seconded by Jim). Troy submitted the Annual Report to the NSS. There are currently 18 NSS members listing the NNG as their primary grotto. The NNG has 3 votes in the Congress of Grottos.

- David gave an abbreviated Treasurer's Report, stating the NNG has funds & will have official numbers at the March meeting and upcoming *Near Normal News*. Treasurer's Report was accepted (motion by Ralph, seconded by Don).

Old Business

- Ralph shared information about the upcoming trip to Sullivan Cave, February 27-29. Ralph will lead a group through the wet portion of the cave, while Troy leads a group through the dry portion. Hotel arrangements are not finalized, but all want a hot tub. Jeffery will not be able to

attend due to a family health situation. Our thoughts & prayers will be with him and his extended family.

New Business

- A newsletter update was tabled until March when John or Jeffery can attend.
- Marc began discussion of the 2004 calendar. Two vertical practices will be slated for June & August. These will likely be a combination meeting/practice.

- Marc suggested we make more contacts with area grottos. It was stated the vertical practices and Annual Picnic have helped facilitate some of those relationships. Troy also mentioned a possible visit to the Sub-Urban Grotto in the near future.

Trip Reports

- Bill mentioned a trip to Buckner's. He says the cave looks cleaner each time and the majority of trash has been found at the waterfall passage. He noted the waterfall was truly a waterfall due to rain the previous week. He also mentioned Trapdoor Cave is now off limits. There is some work on Small And Dull Cave.

- Marc took a trip to TAG and dropped Ellison's and Flowing Stone Caves. He was excited for finally being able to do "the Big Drop" and stated he had more time underground than on the surface.

- Marc was named a Member-at-Large for the Cave Rescue Education Committee for the NCRC. This position entails work as a curriculum coordinator for cave rescue education. Marc has also officially been named as an Instructor for Cave Rescue.

Announcements

- Next NNG meeting will be March 12.
- A Search & Rescue class will be the 3rd weekend of February in the Waterloo area.
- EKV will host rescue school the first weekend of April, in Richmond, VA.
- Bill mentioned a possible trip to Tunnel Hill, mainly focused on biking, but could work an Equality trip into the mix.

Meeting Adjourned at 8:07pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
Troy J. Simpson, Secretary



WHERE'S MARC?

By Marc Tiritilli

The answer this time around is that he's glad to be back from the last cave trip to Sullivan's. Thanks to Ralph Sawyer for organizing a great trip and for all those who attended for making it so much fun! A word to the wise—push low air passages with your helmet off. (Seriously). Public service announcement aside, let me start out by congratulating our new editorial team on the fantastic job they are doing with the newsletter. I'm looking forward to all of the pictures and reports this year will offer.

As usual, my mind is on vertical and rescue training. This year's Orientation to Cave Rescue at Eastern Kentucky

University is April 3-4. This is a great weekend of training and caving. Look for more information at the website listed below.

Plans are in the works for vertical training in Waterloo in the next few weeks, as are our usual outings at the ISU rappelling tower this summer. Also this summer is the National Cave Rescue Commission's weeklong sessions in Corydon, IN. The dates are June 19-26. See the website below for the complete description.

I've managed to get in a good bit of caving and training over the last couple of months, and somehow wound up as



the curriculum coordinator for the NCRC (actually, I volunteered for the position). Should be fun.

I am looking forward to seeing everyone at the upcoming meeting (7pm, Friday, March 12 at National City Bank in Bloomington). The program will be trip reports, pictures, and video from the Sullivan's trip. Please bring your memories from the trip as well as your ideas for caves trips you'd like to see. I'll bring the popcorn. See you there.

—Marc

23rd Annual Rescue School 2004 at Eastern Kentucky University:

http://www.cwe.eku.edu/workforce/2004_Schedules/Rescue%20School%20-%202004.htm

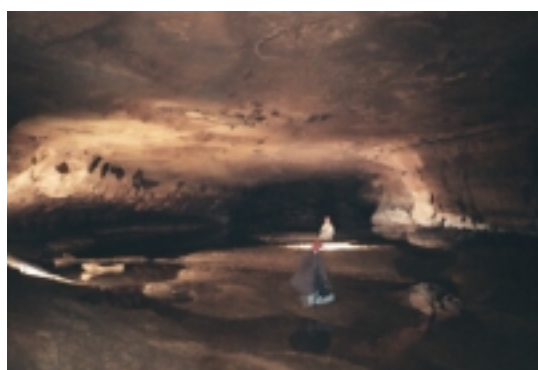
National Cave Rescue Commission:

<http://www.caves.org/io/ncrc/2004Seminar/seminar2004.htm>

SULLIVAN'S CAVE TRIP 2004 PHOTOS *Photos by Troy J. Simpson*

See More Photos and Video Presentations of the Trip at the March 12, 2004 Business Meeting!

And look for more photos and trip reports in the May issue of *THE NEAR NORMAL NEWS*.





RAMBLINGS OF A TROGLODYTE *by Jeffery Gosnell*

So there I am standing at the counter arguing with my mother that \$17/person is way too much to go into a show cave, but she won't hear of it, and the guy at the ticket counter is pressing the sale by asking me how often have I ridden through a cave in a jeep (gag!).

Mom's feeling guilty that I'm missing the Sullivan's trip in order to take her to Tulsa, and, in her mind, this will help make up for it. She doesn't have to make up for anything. With a prognosis of terminal cancer, a trip with mom is worth missing a cave that will still be there next year.

But over my objections, she plops down \$51 to put us on a 45 minute ride through Missouri's *Fantastic Caverns*.

It was actually my second Missouri cave since the last newsletter. In January, John Schirle and I attended a camping conference in the Ozarks. Arriving a day early, the two of us pushed the mazes and crawls of Susan's Cave on Trout Lake.

The cave started off with 400' of mud,

mud, mud, creating its alternate name "Mud Cave." This section had been heavily visited by local camp kids. But 1,100' in, the passage turned into two hundred feet of 1-2' high crawl through chert and stream bed. Miserable? Yes! But an effective "kid filter."

The 1000-2000' of passages beyond the crawl were a narrow, winding maze that required frequent checks of compass and map to make sure we were still in the "main" passage. Most interesting in this formationless cave were several large, deep piles of guano, suggesting spring bat nurseries.

At the camping conference, a caving seminar led by Chris Hespren answered many of the rumors about Illinois Caverns (see page 6). And an orienteering course I took provided me with a number of free topographical maps of public land in Missouri (with a comment from the instructor, that most of the depressions on these maps are caves and sink holes)!

So back at Fantastic Caverns, I rode through the cave, listening to my wife, kids, and mom "ooh & ahh" and trying not to think too much about the Sullivan's

trip I was missing. In the end, I was in the right cave that day.

Now, would anyone like to help me check out those Missouri topo maps?



*Fantastic Caverns, MO.
Photo by Jeffery Gosnell*



*Jeffery in Susans Cave
Photo by John Schirle*

SULLIVAN'S CAVE TRIP PHOTOS

Photos by Troy J. Simpson



Official Answers to Illinois Caverns Rumors

Editor's Note: Chris Hespen is the Illinois Department of Natural Resources' [IDNR] Site Interpreter for Illinois Caverns State Wildlife Area. He graciously agreed to sit down and talk about what is really going on at the cave.

How long have you been at Illinois Caverns [IC]?

Full time for approximately 6 years and seasonally prior to that.

What have been the most significant changes during this time?

With the findings and knowledge of threatened and endangered species, we have had to alter management styles for this site specific resource.

In recent months IDNR has reduced hours at IC. Is this based on budget constraints or ecological concerns?

The decision to reduce the hours was a result of both concerns, budget and ecological. With such a fragile ecosystem, measures must be taken to protect the cave formations, various vertebrates and vertebrate species and the conditions affecting their life cycles. Along with our concerns for the cave ecology is the fact there is only a staff of one to operate this site. With our past, as well as the near future budget constraints, this situation will most likely not change. Therefore, the best method of providing site management, as well as resource management, was to reduce the hours of operation. To date, this has worked well.

What about the rumors that access to IC will eventually only be through guided tours?

That is a factual rumor. It has been proposed, but it is not in the near future. This site is currently staffed with one site interpreter. This position requires one to be responsible for implementing the cave exploration permit, making sure each person entering the caverns has the equipment needs which match the permit, and surface site maintenance, as well as other statewide programs, and interpreter responsibilities. At the site's current staffing level, it is hard to complete the things on the surface and be in the caverns for guided hikes. With current staff and budgeting (loss of the seasonal site interpreter position--this program had brought the staff count to two for a few summer months), it is not feasible at this time to give guided hikes only. Keep in mind however, that part of the IDNR's mission statement and responsibility is not to allow degradation of this resource (geologically, nor with state and federally protected species.)

Two sections of the cave were barricaded in 2003, the first is the passage west of the main entrance. Why was that closed?

The Illinois Cave Amphipods, as most cave adapted aquatic amphipods/isopods, are susceptible to any contaminant brought into the cave stream where they reside. Contaminants put into the surface thirty years ago are still having a detrimental impact on the amphipod populations. There are ongoing agricultural farming practices taking place on all sides of the IC property. Though the farm operators are no longer doing conventional tillage, "no-till" tillage methods require additional herbicides to

be used in order to control any weeds. Karst topography has extremely shallow soil layers which are nature's cleansers in rural counties. IC has approximately 200 acres of restored tall grass prairie on the surface. Prairie plants are one of the best barriers for holding back sediments due to their deep root systems. With the prairie on the surface, the water quality in the caverns is at its optimum around the entrance, and directly underneath the prairie. With the amphipods having a direct correlation with water quality, their populations are thought to be at their highest here. Therefore, we have set that area aside for their protection.

What can you tell us about the closure of the Lunch Room?

This area is the most decorated area of speleothems on IDNR property. In order to gain access to the Lunch Room, one would have to walk, crawl, and trample many cave formations. Only twenty-five states have some sort of cave protection laws or statute in place. One thing that these laws or statutes have in common, it is illegal to deface, remove or manipulate any cave formation. It is for the protection of the remaining speleothems on "state" land that we intend to preserve [the Lunch Room].

There has been talk that IDNR is going to barricade the main passage at the property line in the main passage. Is there any truth to these rumors?

No, not at this time.

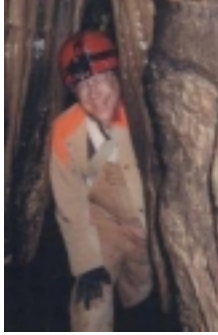
Is the state pursuing easement agreements with its neighbors?

Yes, this is happening and is being discussed with the Illinois Caverns Task Force. There are other divisions within IDNR (Natural Heritage and land acquisition people) helping to achieve this task.

How is the new interpretive center at IC to be used?

This building will have two main functions, as an office for the Site Interpreter and to provide an area where the Site Interpreter can display and/or discuss the cave system. It is very obvious that an adequate office is needed at this site. Because of our present budget situation, this building is being constructed with site funds and site staff. This is rather unusual in that a major project like this is usually handled and funded at the Springfield office level. However, because the competition for the funds at the Springfield level is so great, it would have been several more years before an office would have been constructed. We are hopeful, however, that there may be some funds coming forward to provide some high quality displays/materials. These would be funded through the Office of Land Management and Education in Springfield and displayed in the new office building.





FIRST AID KIT FOR CAVERS *by Jim Jacobs*

Designing a first aid kit for cavers presents an interesting challenge. In an ambulance, while space is a consideration, there is room for enough equipment to cover a wide variety of emergencies. Weight is not a primary consideration, since equipment is being carried in a motor vehicle, and paramedics

learn to work as teams to carry what is needed to the accident site and set it up, usually a short distance from where the vehicle is parked. To decide what one should take on a trip into a cave, the following considerations, at least, must be dealt with:

1. Weight. My favorite saying concerning this factor is, "Every ounce becomes a pound in a crawlway." Locomotion in caves is accomplished using a variety of methods. Sometimes, one can actually walk upright on smooth ground, but this is a rarity. In most caves, at one time or the other, you have to crawl. Even when you are lucky enough to be able to get up to hands and knees, a pack becomes burdensome. As the height of the passage goes up and down, you are forever having to shift the pack to a new position. In tight passages, which force you down on your belly and you move forward by "toes and elbows," you must choose between pushing the pack ahead of you and hooking it to your boot and dragging it. After a while, the pack seems to gain weight. This can be more than illusion when you are going through water and mud. The pack *can* gain weight. The amount of weight that you carry can also be a safety factor. Carrying a lot of weight induces fatigue, which increases the possibility of an accident. A heavy pack can cause you to over-balance and fall when canyoning or traversing a tricky ledge.

2. Bulk. Even if the pack is not overly heavy, bulk must be kept to a minimum in order to not constrict your passage through holes, chimneys, and tight crawlways. What you have in your pack is what you need to survive: food, water, perhaps cooking utensils, equipment necessary for safety like spare lights, bulbs and batteries, ropes and other vertical equipment if the cave calls for it. And your first aid supplies. If you have to leave it behind in order to visit that pretty room through the hole at the top of that climb, then you're compromising your safety and, perhaps, that of others in your party. This happened to a father and his two sons a couple of years ago in Trout Cave, VA. They had left their packs behind to visit a special room in the cave, figuring they would be gone only a short time and would come back the same way, so they would pick them up again. After they entered the room, their carbide lamps went out, and they could not get them to relight, since they had run out of carbide. Since it was totally dark, they couldn't move to find their way and risked severe injury or death if they tried. They were found alive, but it took nearly five days. If even one of them had taken a spare light, they wouldn't have had to go through their harrowing ordeal, but their spares were buried in the packs.

3. You cannot call 911 two miles into a cave. Help will not arrive soon, so you must plan to keep the patient stable for hours until help arrives. Besides the immediacy of the wound or illness, provision must be made for the long-term comfort and

care of the patient. The two main problems to deal with are the possibility of shock, and the probability of hypothermia if proper steps are not taken. Caves in this latitude average between 50 and 54F, and tend to be damp (or outright wet) and muddy.

4. The contents of your pack must be packaged in such a way that everything can survive very rough treatment, mud, water, and other calamities without spilling their contents or being ruined by the conditions. To this end, I began by purchasing a small first aid kit, which besides the standard fare of band-aids and other items had the added advantage of being packed in an aluminum box, which when padded, should survive a rigorous trip intact. This kit contains:

- 1-3" x 3" sterile gauze pad
- 1-2" x 2" sterile gauze pad
- 1-4" roller bandage
- 5-band-aids
- 3-cotton balls
- 1- 1/2" roll adhesive tape
- 1-sm. bar cleansing soap
- 2-iodine swabs
- 2-alcohol swabs
- 1-tin sunburn preventative cream (a *must* for every cave trip)
- 1-iodine pad
- 1-alcohol pad
- 6-aspirins
- 1-pk. lubricating jelly
- 1-sterile eye patch
- 1-benzalkonium chloride pad
- 1-aloe vera pad
- 1-first aid instruction sheet. (the information does look to be correct).

To this basic kit, I have added:

- 2-2" roller bandages
- 1-4 1/2" x 4.1 yd. roller bandage
- 1-3" elastic bandage (for sprains)
- 1-plastic film container of assorted pain-killers, such as Tylenol, and Ibuprophen.
- 8-4" x 4" sterile gauze pads
- 1-space blanket (to shelter from drafts and retain body heat)
- 1-tube first aid/burn salve
- 1-sm. cooking stove w/ trioxane fuel bars. For preparing coffee, tea, or even hot Pepsi.
- 3-triangular bandages
- 2-Inflatable splints. (one leg, one arm)
- Candles and matches in waterproof containers. For warmth and possible cooking.
- Coffee and tea bags, sugar
- Warming pads (2 large, 2 med., 1 sm.), activated by exposing the contents to air by opening the package. Can provide heat up to 12 hours.

I carry and/or wear at least two large bandannas, which can double as cravat bandages for small injuries.

Everything is in the pack. I carried it through a cave this last Saturday, and found it to be no problem. I also wear a fanny pack, and carry such items as spare batteries and food bars in it.

***Caving & Kids* Part 2—Planning & Leading The Youth Caving Trip** *by John Schirle*

The first time I took kids from my church caving, one boy returned home and told his parents that it was “the best experience of his life”. I was amazed — caving, in his mind, had beat out Six-Flags, Disney World and summer camp.

For many of the same reasons we like caving, it is a tremendous experience for a well-prepared group of youth. It challenges and stretches them. It expects them to behave responsibly and work together as a team. It teaches appreciation of and care for the natural world. And it combines all this with the opportunity for hands-on learning about science, conservation and even oneself.

I want to present some principles and practices I’ve developed (or freely stolen) for planning and leading a youth trip. Many in our grotto can add excellent ideas from their own experience, and I hope mine will contribute to the dialogue.

ADVANCE PREPARATIONS

Unless the youth are from your own class or group, you’ll need to liaison with the leader (teacher, scoutmaster, etc.) who is responsible for the group. The leader must be committed to helping lead and coordinate the trip, or you shouldn’t agree to take the group caving.

Well in advance, talk with the teacher about your mutual expectations for the trip. Determine together:

- 1) How many youth you can take.
- 2) How many adults to recruit.
- 3) What everyone needs to bring.
- 4) Who is driving.
- 5) Who will handle discipline.

For the parents, you or the teacher should prepare a single page describing the trip, yourself as the trip leader, and a list of exactly what the students should bring or wear. If possible, include your phone number or email so parents with questions can contact you prior to the trip. The teacher should make certain this gets into the parents’ hands. (Just sending it home from school with the students does not mean Mom will ever see it.)

A signed parental permission form and medical release is needed. The school probably has a standard form they use. For your purposes, you’ll want to know if there are any medical conditions that will impact a student’s ability to cave. I once had a fifth grade caver with congenital heart condition that affected his circulation. I sat down with the mother prior to the trip and had her tell me what to watch for and what to do if her son should get too cold. We didn’t have any problems, but it helped me and the mother to talk it over in advance.

NUMBER OF YOUTH

It’s difficult to set an absolute limit. It depends on the cave, the age and experience of the youth, the number of adults going, and whether or not you have enough experienced cavers to break into multiple smaller groups. However, think in terms of what makes for an ideal group size. To use Illinois Caverns as an example: Yes, I can lead a group of 20-25 through Illinois Caverns. However, we’ll move slowly, it will be noisy, there are few places where we can all gather together, and it probably won’t be the best experience. It would be much better if I limited the group size to 12. With many more than that, I should recruit another caver and break into two groups.

NUMBER OF ADULTS

Ideally, I think you should have a minimum of four adults for the same reasons that you want a minimum of four cavers in a party. If anyone should get injured to the point they require outside help, you’ll want at least two adults to stay with the injured party, and two to lead the other cavers out. If you’re going to have both boys and girls, try to have at least one female and one male adult.

THE PRE-TRIP BRIEFING

I will not take a youth group caving without a pre-trip briefing. This may take place several days in advance, or the night before. Ideally, I like to travel to wherever we’re going the night before, and do the briefing there. That way, we don’t have to go so far the next day, and we can make

certain that everyone has all the appropriate gear and clothing ready for the next morning. It’s no fun to arrive at Illinois Caverns and discover that one of the kids has only brought flip flops or not brought a change of clothes.

The pre-trip briefing is important for several reasons:

- 1) It allows me to get to know the kids. I want to find out what they want from the trip. I want to see how well they work together, listen to instructions, and obey their leaders. I want to know if any are scared and try to address those concerns.
- 2) It allows me to teach safe and responsible caving. The entrance to the cave is not the place to do this. They will be much too excited and impatient at that point.
- 3) It allows me to teach about speleology. I want to communicate at least the basics of cave ecology and conservation. Understanding the fragility of the cave environment helps to underscore why we must cave responsibly.

In the briefing, I explain my ***GUIDELINES FOR SAFE & RESPONSIBLE CAVING***. Stealing liberally from various sources, I’ve distilled these into a few simple lists which form my outline:

Why do we have rules for safe & responsible caving?

- To protect us from the cave (the "safe" part).
- To protect the cave from us (the "responsible" part).

4, 3, 2, 1 Rules of a Safe Caving Trip

- Minimum of 4 people in your group
- Minimum of 3 sources of light
- Minimum of 2 people on the surface who know where you’re going and when you’re expected back
- Minimum of 1 experienced caver

Continued Next Page

Rules for Safely Moving Through Caves

- Stay in Control. Don't run or jump. Test your footing before stepping into water. Don't engage in "horseplay." Use three points of contact when moving around, over, up or down obstacles. Pay attention to the cave and one another
- Conserve your energy. When you have a choice, take the easier route. Stay as dry as you can as long as you can. Take time to rest, drink and eat.
- Work together as a team. Help each other out. Encourage. Inform the person directly behind you of any obstacles. Let the group or group leader know if you have a problem (tired, cold, scared, need a break).

Take nothing but pictures, leave nothing but footprints, kill nothing but time.

I bring examples of all the appropriate gear and clothing We go over each item, what to bring and why it's important.

Lastly, if we go down the night before, I lead the group in team-building activities. These serve two purposes. First, these show the group that safe caving requires them to be responsible to and for one another. Second, these help me to see how individuals interact and respond to rules and direction.

GUIDELINES IN THE CAVE

Take your time. Most groups I encounter in Illinois Caverns are moving too fast to either be safe or appreciate and enjoy the cave. Remember that the individuals who end up in the back are often the slowest, and have to work the hardest to keep up. Stop regularly. Take time to point out key features, formations and caving practices. Especially at first, check with each individual occasionally to make certain they're doing OK. It's not sufficient to ask "Is everyone OK?" — the ones who are not probably won't speak up.

Stick together. In a long, narrow passage, don't let the group get strung out. Each person should be responsible for staying in sight of the person behind him. Assign one adult to the back. When you see that person, you'll know that the whole group is there.

Tailor your trip to the group — not the other way around! Each group is different, and where you go in the cave, how fast you go, how far you go, how much time you spend crawling/climbing/walking/resting will depend on what best suits the mix of individuals in your group. Elementary students typically move in short bursts of energy. They can go hard for a few minutes, then need a break. They usually won't go as far as older students in a long cave, but love to poke into all sorts of little side passages. Teens can

go longer at a stretch, and may prefer to go further and explore less.

Let the youth lead. When you think they're ready, let some of them take turns leading. Explain what's expected of them, helping as needed. On your way into the cave, tell them you'll want some to lead on the way out. Show how to check out a junction from the other direction as you go through, so they can be prepared to guide the group out.

Leave before everyone is tired. In almost any group, some will be ready to exit the cave earlier than others. If you have two cavers leading, one can take a first group out early, and the other can continue with the rest for an agreed-upon length of time. If you don't have that luxury, however, when the first ones start wearing out, it's time to consider leaving soon. That will disappoint those who'd rather stay longer. However, I'd rather err on the side of caution, and make certain everyone has a positive experience, than to continue too long for some.

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*Fantastic Caverns, MO
Photos by Jeffery Gosnell*