

# Cave Safely, Cave Softly

## Requirements for Unit Caving

**Cave Safely, Cave Softly is the Boy Scouts of America's procedure for organizing BSA activities in commercial and non-commercial caves or lava tubes**

### Cavers live by this Motto

Take nothing but pictures,

Leave nothing but carefully placed footprints,

Kill nothing but time!



Caves represent some of the world's most accessible yet fragile wilderness resources. Cavers enter caves to explore, study and protect the cave, its beautiful formations and unique wildlife. Cavers understand the risks involved when exploring such areas and are prepared for the challenge. Taking youth into the total darkness of a unique ecological environment, to see some of the earth's most magnificent creations, provides opportunities for growth. Caving is an exciting activity that can be appropriate for all levels of Scouting, and caves are found within a few hours drive in most of the country.

The Qualified Trip Leader is responsible for all procedures for safely conducting the caving activity. The adult supervisor works cooperatively with the Qualified Trip Leader and is responsible for all matters outside of the caving activity. If at any time the Qualified Trip Leader feels that the rules are not being followed, or there is unsafe activity, then the Qualified Trip Leader has the right to cancel the trip.

For more information refer to the “NSS Guide to Responsible Caving” (<http://caves.org/brochure/NSS%20Guide%20Color%20809.pdf>)

Cub Scouts and Webelos Scouts are encouraged to visit commercially operated caves and lava tubes. For commercial operations, Leaders should follow the guidelines set by the operators and reference Cave Safely, Cave Softly for more information. Non-Commercial “Easy Caves” with no access control, such as those in parks where people of all abilities are allowed uncontrolled access, may also be suitable for Cub Scouts and Webelos.



Boy Scout age youth are generally mature enough to enter “Easy wild caves” which means; easily accessible, non-technical/non-vertical caves. A “wild cave” is anything that is not commercially operated with a professional tour guide.

Older Boy Scouts, Varsity Scouts, Sea Scouts and Venturers should be ready to explore more technical wild caves.

## **1. Qualified Supervision**

All caving activities must be supervised by a mature, conscientious adult at least 21 years of age who understands the risks inherent to

these activities. This person knowingly accepts responsibility for the well-being and safety of the youth in his or her care. This adult supervisor is trained in and committed to compliance with the eight points of the Boy Scouts of America's Cave Safely, Cave Softly procedure and responsible for recruiting and verifying the qualifications of the Qualified Trip Leader.

Two adult supervisors are required for every 12 participants with a minimum of two adults for any one group, and must be physically present with the group at all times. Adult supervisors must review the 8 points of Cave Safely, Cave Softly with their youth group prior to the cave trip.

The adult supervisor is responsible for ensuring that someone in the group is currently trained in Wilderness First Aid. The group must carry a first aid kit that is appropriate for the experience. It is strongly recommended that all of the youth have completed a basic first aid course, or have earned the First Aid Merit Badge, prior to the caving trip, and all members should have in their possession a small personal basic first aid kit.

## 2. Qualified Trip Leader



**Non-vertical caving:** For trips to non-vertical caves, there must be one Qualified Trip Leader, at least 21 years of age, and one additional Trip Leader, that is at least 16 years of age. Qualified Trip Leaders must have recent and ongoing caving experience and preferably be a member of the National Speleological Society (NSS) or equivalent. They must be proficient in all necessary established safety practices including cave rescue, and must also understand conservation measures, courtesy to cave owners, and any current environmental

concerns for that caving area. The Qualified Trip Leader must be very familiar with the cave to be visited.



**Vertical Caving:** Qualified Trip Leaders for vertical caving must be proficient in both non-vertical caving skills listed above and vertical caving skills. Two Qualified Trip Leaders are required. Vertical caving requires special ascending and descending equipment and techniques (vertical caving skills). In addition, they must be able to perform on rope rescues in case of an emergency.

The Qualified Trip Leader managing the vertical caving activity must meet the following criteria:

- Have successfully completed Intermediate Vertical Training or equivalent from a training source associated with NSS and:
  - Should have at least one year of ongoing vertical caving experience
  - Have experience teaching vertical caving techniques
  - *Note: Qualified Trip Leaders must maintain their skills through ongoing vertical activity and/or training*

OR

- Be a qualified instructor in accordance with *Climb on Safely* (other than qualifications that are limited to artificial structures) and be currently trained from either of the following:
  - National Speleological Society (NSS) Intermediate Vertical Training or equivalent from a training source associated with NSS
  - Council approved vertical caving training that is taught by someone who has successfully completed “Intermediate Vertical Training” from a training source associated with NSS

All qualified trip leaders must be current in their training and qualifications (assessment or documented practice within three years).

Qualified Trip Leaders must assure that all participants in the caving activity possess basic level vertical caving skills as established by NSS (see <http://caves.org/safety/safety.shtml#newbies>).

There are many institutions and/or businesses that offer training for climbing and rappelling; however, most do not prepare instructors to lead groups of people on caving trips. Your local council COPE and Climbing Committee, Area COPE and Climbing Advocates, and Region COPE and Climbing Chairs can help locate resources in the NSS to answer questions about caving. For guidance or additional information, contact the BSA's Outdoor Programs/Properties Department through your local council office.

### **3. Physical Fitness**

Adult supervisors must require evidence of fitness for caving activities with a current BSA Annual Health and Medical Record. The adult supervisor must adapt all supervision, discipline, and precautions to anticipate any potential risks (claustrophobia, fear of total darkness, etc) with individual health conditions. The adult supervisor should inform the Qualified Trip Leader about each participant's medical conditions.

### **4. Safety**

The overall capability and pace of a caving group is always that of the least able member of that group, and no member of the group should ever be encouraged or permitted to attempt an act that is beyond their ability even when the remainder of the group has the necessary ability. All participants must complete a pre-trip cave safety inspection of all necessary equipment, conducted by the Qualified Trip Leader, prior to leaving on the trip. Each participant should learn to identify natural and simulated hazards and be prepared to use the buddy system to

monitor such concerns as, dehydration, hypothermia, and an unusually high degree of fear or apprehension.

Vertical caving by BSA groups is only permitted when all the participants possess the basic level vertical caving skills established by the National Speleological Society (see <http://caves.org/safety/safety.shtml#newbies>).

Vertical caving skills must be taught under controlled conditions above ground. All youth are required to wear their complete ascending system anytime they are on rope. When safe and practical, bottom belays must be used during rappelling. If a bottom belay can't be used safely, then an auto-block hitch or separate top belay must be used.

For safety reasons, a hand line should be used on slick areas or for short scrambling climbs. If there is a steep area to be down climbed that is more than approximately two body lengths, then vertical gear and training is recommended.

## 5. Equipment

It is the responsibility of the Qualified Trip Leader to ensure that all



equipment is appropriate for the cave being visited, and that each member has all of the required equipment prior to leaving for the caving trip. Under no conditions should any member of the group be permitted to enter the cave if they do not have all of the required equipment in their possession. (No sharing of required equipment)

Required Personal Equipment (Qualified Trip Leader will set final requirements for personal equipment):

- Wear a helmet with a quick release clip. (Should meet UIAA or CE standards.)
- Have 3 sources of light (two headlamps securely mounted on the helmet and another headlamp easily accessible)
- Sets of spare batteries for each headlamp
- Wear proper clothing for the environment (consult Qualified Trip Leader)
- Gloves (with fingers)
- Appropriate footwear as specified by Qualified Trip Leader
- Knee pads & elbow pads are strongly recommended
- Small personal first aid kit
- Appropriate food and water
- Small (loud) whistle
- Hypothermia kit (large plastic bag, matches & a tea candle)
- Other Emergency essentials as required by the Qualified Trip Leader

## **6. Planning**

All members of the trip must have completed the “Caving Introduction” training program on the NSS website prior to their caving trip (see <http://caves.org/youth/National%20BSA%20youth%20caving%20presentation%204-13.pdf>).

When planning, remember the following:

- Share the caving plan and the alternate activity with parents and the unit committee.
- Secure the necessary permits or written permission for using private or public lands.
- Qualified Trip Leaders plan for the caving portion of the activity.

- Group size should follow regulations established by the managing jurisdiction for the cave. Groups entering wild/unimproved caves should not exceed 14 individuals total including adult supervision and Qualified Trip Leaders. If the group is larger, then additional Qualified Trip Leaders and qualified supervisors must be recruited to subdivide the group. Remember that each group must have the gear and supplies to function independently of one another.
- The Qualified Trip Leader must have an emergency plan that includes contacting rescuers in the event of an emergency, and must be shared with the entire group.
- The adult supervisor must leave specific information about the caving trip with two responsible persons *before* the group leaves on the trip. This information must include:
  - The GPS location and name of the cave
  - Cave Map (If available)
  - Length of time in cave
  - Time you will call to advise that you are out of the cave
  - Roster of participants and their emergency contact information
  - What to do if you become separated from the group
  - Phone number for emergency services in the trip area in case you do not return on time

## **7. Conservation**

Always practice “Leave No Trace”. Pack out what you packed in & never take anything out of a cave that belongs in it. Never spray paint or write or mark on any part of a cave. Never remove anything from a cave; this is a federal crime in many caves. Do not touch cave formations with bare hands or dirty gloves, as contact can interfere with future growth of the formation. Remember that you are a guest in a cave and cave life must never be disturbed or removed from the



cave for any purpose. During the winter months, hibernating bats should never be disturbed. Bats that are awakened too often will use up their winter's store of fuel and die of starvation before summer. The Qualified Trip Leader will explain your regions White Nose Syndrome or other decontamination protocol.

Personal sanitation requirements should be met before entering the cave. If there is a sanitation issue while in the cave, then the appropriate containers must be packed out of the cave. Human waste will destroy the ecosystem of a cave and will also ruin the area for the next group of cavers.

## **8. Discipline**



Each participant knows, understands, and respects the rules and procedures for Cave Safely, Cave Softly and Leave No Trace. All participants should respect and follow all instructions and rules of the Qualified Trip Leader. The applicable rules should be presented and learned prior to the outing and should be reviewed for all participants before activity begins. Running, jumping, horseplay, and solo exploration must be prohibited, these actions jeopardize not only the individual, but also the entire group.

### **Additional Information**

Cave Rescue—The National Speleological Society's National Cave Rescue Commission (NCRC) is a good source of information on cave rescue.

Those interested in a caving trip may contact a local chapter (grotto) of the National Speleological Society (NSS) at [www.caves.org](http://www.caves.org).