

Caving 101 - with Descriptions

A program developed and offered by the Windy City Grotto in Chicago, Illinois

This is an approach to providing a continuing education for the beginner to become gradually adept and knowledgeable on caving, designed by the Windy City Grotto in Chicago. The following information was provided to the *NSS Administration Memo* by the chairman and printed there in June 1994.

The Windy City Grotto's "Intro to Caving" series has existed in various forms since the mid-1960s. It was originally started for the same reasons as today—to educate beginners. It consists of slides and show-and-tell on whatever happens to be the topic for the month, administered by a grotto member the Board feels is the most qualified to do so. Sometimes the area of interest merits 45 minutes to an hour for its presentation (like the September topic on Ropes), and sometimes it's just a 15-minute mini-presentation that will precede some other slide or video show during the "Program" half of our monthly meetings. In the event that a complete set of show-and-tell items is not available (or is not practical), members of the safety committee and whoever else was necessary and available gathered for a photo session of the items. Slides are then shown for items that can't be passed around the room, and are therefore an important part of the Intro to Caving ("slide") series.

The January topic is "Intro to Caving." The first program of the calendar year, during a relatively cold month to go caving, is an overview of the upcoming program in its entirety. It uses selected slides from all the following eleven months, slides of various trips and locations, and anything else to bring some excitement to the mind of the novice. The January program, by its nature, is a long one, and does not allow time for presentation of any other unrelated slide or video material during the Program half of our meetings.

The February topic is "Extremities." This program deals with helmets, gloves, boots, and socks. Right and wrong examples are shown. Reasons are given why one helmet or boot is better than another. "Extremities" can be either long or short in program length.

The March topic is "Clothing and Coveralls," dealing with what you should and shouldn't wear into a cave. . . the bare minimum to get by, and the "Cadillac" way to go. Cave packs can also be discussed. "Clothing and Coveralls" is a short program.

The April topic is "Carbide Lamps." One of our most experienced cavers (and collector of carbide lamps) gives his annual talk on his areas of interest. History, usage, safety, and maintenance are all explained. "Carbide Lamps" is a short program.

The May topic is "Electric Lights." Various types are shown; room lights are turned off and bulb brightnesses are compared. Batteries and battery packs, with advantages and drawbacks are discussed. "Electric Lights" is a short program.

The June topic is "Horizontal Techniques." How to move through a cave - using hand and footholds properly - crawlways, duckwalking, and other styles of movement - and safety tips. "Horizontal Techniques" can be either long or short in program length, depending on whether you want to hold a "crawling contest." (Just set up an obstacle course using the chairs in the room.)

The July topic is "Vertical Techniques." Our most experienced vertical caver explains information on climbing, points-of-contact, and basic ropework. Basic harnesses are shown; various kinds of ascending/descending devices are explained, and safety is given a thorough discussion. "Vertical Techniques" is a longer length program.

The August topic is "First Aid." In addition to basic safety, a discussion of hypothermia is presented, as well as first aid kits and what should belong in every caver's pack. "First Aid" is a short-length program.

The September topic is "Cave Conservation." Overall appreciation of the world underground and its frailty is emphasized. Water purity for cave formation is explained. Cave-owner relations and bats are also discussed. This topic makes for a short-length program.

The October topic is "Ropes." Differences in rope construction are shown. Pieces of rope are given to everyone in the room as the leader discusses knots. There is also an explanation of rigging and more safety. "Ropes" is usually a longer program.

The November topic is "Surveying and Maps." This is usually the topic the most people know the least about, but are eager to learn. How to read a topo map - the

function and use of all the different survey instruments - the function of each person on the survey team - all ending in a "hands-on" survey of the room. This program can be either long or short.

The December topic is "Photography." Basic camera gear is discussed - different types of flash units - tripods - camera cases - techniques - and a mention of videography. "Photography" can be either a long or short length program.

The series serves as vital information for the novice, as well as a refresher for the more advanced grotto mem-

ber. The point is hopefully to serve the interests of all levels of cavers in a grotto

. In addition to the above series, our membership committee is assembling a New Member Packet, containing a list of essential caving clothing and basic equipment for novices, a checklist for personal first aid, a list of what a cave pack should contain, and a list of suppliers for all of the above. The packet might also contain a list of essential equipment for vertical caving, outfitters providing training in climbing techniques, scuba shops, where to find or order books on caving, and an updated history and information sheet on the grotto.