

# A Nerd's Guide to Caving (source unknown)

**Getting Ready** - It is most likely that you will be doing something besides just strolling through a huge passage. Practice for it. Crawl around under your furniture. Find out what your minimum height under something is for those low-w-w crawlways. Crawl up and down your driveway at night (if it's graveled), with a flashlight stuck in your mouth. Climb something (at night). Try passing your body through a coat hanger without using wire cutters on it. Sit in your closet with the lights out to see if you are claustrophobic. Borrow the helmet you are going to wear, put it on, and bang your head against some concrete to see how much impact you can take before becoming senseless.

Take a very cold bath and/or shower fully clothed. Find out the least busy time for your local laundromat (You won't want to wash your clothes in your washer, and you won't want to have other people seeing the condition of your stuff, believe me). Hint: use the local car wash to get most of the mud off before using a washing machine. The car wash is also a great place for a communal shower to remove most of the mud from your body (and cheap if you're going to divide the cost among everybody on the trip), but the locals will want you to keep your clothes on.

Visit your nearest Army Surplus and Salvation Army for clothing. It is unwise to wear something new since it will be ragged when you emerge to daylight anyway. You will blow the knees in just about any pair of pants, and probably rip the rear end out as well. (Wear several layers in case you are modest.) Besides, real cavers don't like the look of new stuff and will probably make the trip more tortuous than necessary to make sure that everything gets broken in.

Buy kneepads. If your leader says, "Nah, you don't need kneepads," then it probably means they don't really like you, and are only tolerating your begging to go on a cave trip.

If you are going to use carbide as your light source and will be transporting it in your car, make sure you have bail money or a phone number of next of kin in case local cops don't believe your story and bust you for being a subversive. Unknown chemicals, helmets and army surplus clothing found by a night cop can't be explained too satisfactorily in any way. Practice making frantic phone calls. (This is also a good idea in case your leader forgets to tell you that you do not have permission to enter the cave and you get arrested for trespassing, assuming, of course, that the landowner doesn't shoot first and ask questions later.) Ah well, never mind. Real cavers don't trespass. Knowingly. Very often.

Find a dark country road where the landowners all own noisy hound dogs and pit bulls. Practice changing your

clothes while standing in the middle of the road. Time yourself. Fast changes under pressure are an asset. Make sure your life insurance is paid up and that you have the appropriate beneficiary names. (Our grotto would be a nice touch, and not refused.)

**On the Trip** - As a nerd you are expected to help haul gear. Although your own personal stuff may not weigh much, real caver's packs do. It is part of your privilege of being with real cavers to volunteer to help them haul stuff. After all, you might be using part of it (camera equipment, first aid stuff, rope, snorkel, body bag, etc.).

Do not keep asking your leader if he/she knows where they are. Of course they know. Most underground systems don't go into another state. You are therefore in [insert state here]. You don't need to know anything else. If your leaders are temporarily confused about which part of the cave system they are in, they aren't going to tell you anyway.

It is required in some cave systems for all cavers to carry out their body wastes. Since this will probably be in the same pack as your food, it is not advised to confuse the two.

Do you ask if you are in unexplored (virgin) cave? You haven't explored it, therefore it is virgin to you. Don't ask how much unexplored cave there is. If nobody's explored it, then how would anybody know how much is there?

Do you ask if it is always so dark in a cave? Save that question for a commercial cave tour where that kind of question is openly tolerated.

Pack indestructible food. Beef jerky, trail mix, hard candy, juice in a cardboard container, and a canteen are a good bet. Be prepared for the fact that anything you pack will have accumulated dirt and grit to some degree. You may practice for it if you so desire, or just accept the fact. If you are a smoker, find out from your leader if he/she cares if you smoke in the cave. This is an extremely controversial topic around political circles at present.

**After the Trip** - Thank your leader for returning you alive. Count your blessings. It was a good trip if you were underground longer than it took you to drive there, and if the number of bruises is more than the number of cavers at the campfire. Don't consider yourself a real caver. Not yet. If you aren't whining, you're on your way to becoming one, though.

Have a drink. You deserve one.