

Minimal Impact Caving Guidelines

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Introduction

Caving is a fascinating recreational activity which attracts the interest of a diverse range of people and groups, who all benefit immensely from the experience. However, some caves and some areas within them can be sensitive to human interference. By following the few simple guidelines set out in this booklet the cave environment can be conserved for future generations to enjoy

This code is divided into two sections, one relating to general cave visits and the other relating to the exploration of a newly discovered cave or section of cave.

General Cave Visits

1. Every caving trip has an impact. It is important to select a site to visit that is appropriate to the group and type of trip being undertaken. Certain caves are less susceptible to damage and more suitable for novices. Advice is available from the Regional Caving Council or local clubs.
2. Where a Cave Conservation Plan is in existence abide by the recommendations contained therein for the conservation of the cave.
3. The party size should be appropriate to the vulnerability of the cave. The more vulnerable the cave environment, the smaller the party size needs to be. Cave Conservation Plans may stipulate a minimum and/or maximum party size. Access Controls Bodies may also limit party size at some caves.
4. Cave as a team. Help each other through the cave and ensure that party members stay together. Stragglers may take the wrong route and enter vulnerable areas.

5. Cave at a sensible pace for the party. You will see and enjoy more, and there will be less chance of damage to the cave and to yourself. This especially applies when one is tired and exiting a cave.

6. Take care yourself and constantly watch when your party members are moving towards sensitive areas such as relict sediment deposits and speleothems e.g. stalagmites, stalactites and flowstone. Warn party members before they are likely to do any damage.

7. If there are novices on a trip, make sure that they are always close to an experienced caver, so that the experienced caver can help them when required e.g. in difficult sections

8. Keep tackle bags and packs as small as possible and transport them carefully.

9. Stay on marked or obvious paths. If no paths are marked or none is obvious take particular care. If in doubt, do not proceed further.

10. Learn to recognise sensitive cave deposits or features that may be damaged by walking or crawling on them such as cracked mud floors or flowstone floors.

11. If it appears necessary to walk or crawl on a sensitive floor do not proceed. If others appear to have walked over it, confirm that this is the route before proceeding and then only proceed with the utmost care having removed boots and other clothing as necessary. Remember that someone may have previously mistaken this for the route and further damage should be avoided.

12. Throughout a cave the established marked routes must be used. Single tracks should be followed and care taken to avoid the spreading of mud. Mud-throwing or modelling is unacceptable.

13. Restore any missing or damaged marker tapes or route markers. If not possible, report the problem to the appropriate Regional Caving Council as soon as possible. Also report any instances where tapes or markers appear to be ineffective.

14. Treat all cave wildlife with respect, watch out for them, and avoid disturbing them. Also avoid directly illuminating cave wildlife if possible. Bats are protected by law.

15. Ensure that all foreign matter is removed from caves. This includes human waste. If long trips are to be made into a cave, ensure that containers for the removal of liquid and solid waste are included on the trip inventory. The use of carbide is strongly discouraged as it causes soot deposition on the cave roof and speleothems.

16. If any damage or degradation is noticed report this to the appropriate Regional Caving Council as soon as possible.

17. CAVE WITH CARE.

New Cave or Extension Explorations

1. Modification of cave entrances and passages, including changing water levels in sumps or ducks and diversion of streams, should only be undertaken after all possible effects have been assessed and the appropriate permission obtained from the landowner. Any modifications must be the minimum required. The long term impact of any work and materials used must be considered. If the site is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest or a Scheduled Monument, a 'Consent' will also be required from the Statutory Conservation Body.

2. Use the cave survey to ensure that all alternative routes are examined prior to crossing sensitive or fragile areas. It may not be necessary to enter some areas as they can be by-passed.

3. Do not enter new cave or passage if you do not have the equipment required to undertake the minimum recommended activities of surveying, taping and photography.

4. Make a full photographic record before any other work is undertaken or visits made which are likely to result in any damage or deterioration. Copies of the photographs should be placed in a suitable library for safe keeping and submitted to the regional cave registry or caving council for record purposes.

5. Discuss taping and route marking within the party and ensure that all ideas are evaluated before marking is undertaken and before the sensitive area is crossed.

6. If a sensitive area must be crossed, reduce future damage by defining a distinct minimum practicable width of path using conservation tape.

7. Scientific investigation should begin as quickly as possible. Advice may be sought from the British Cave Research Association. The existing microbiology of the new cave, both fungi, bacteria, and a world of protozoa, will almost certainly be irreversibly contaminated on the first trip. If cave microbiologists are available then include them on initial explorations so that they may collect uncontaminated samples.

8. Bones or other archaeological material should not be moved at all unless under imminent threat. Collection should only be undertaken with permission from the relevant Statutory Conservation Body if the cave is a Designated Site. Photograph any find in situ if possible and contact the Regional Caving Council for advice. It is unlikely to hold up explorations beyond a few days whilst an archaeological record is compiled.

9. Collection of specimens, (including geological) which must be approved by the appropriate statutory authority, should be kept to the minimum required for study purposes only.

10. Camping in a cave should only be considered when intending to undertake a specific speleological or conservation objective. All human introduced wastes, including carbide, foodstuffs and excreta, must be removed from the cave and disposed of properly.

11. Caves must not be disfigured by unnecessary marking, including 'direction arrows'. Survey markers should be small and inconspicuous.

12. Make a plan right from the beginning to remove all redundant equipment upon completion of an exploratory dig. If the dig fails "to go" provision should be made to clear up before all interest is lost. Leave the dig in a safe and tidy condition. Seek help from other cavers if necessary.

13. Instigate the production of a Cave Conservation Plan.

14. CAVE WITH CARE.