

Project Caving Etiquette

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With much input from Phil Lucas, Tony Canike, Paul Winter, and Ben Schwartz

Pre-Trip

- First off, don't invite yourself on a trip without asking the trip leader first. There are many cases when a team can get too large for the task at hand.
- Follow the lead of the caver whom is the primary contact with the landowner. Doing an "end run" around this person can confuse the landowner, screw up relationships, and ultimately result in losing access to a cave. Don't believe for an instant that one landowner's ruined opinion of the caving community won't be heard by the next cave owner down the road.
- Always respect the wishes of the cave owner. Don't visit the cave without letting the owner know, even if he or she has given you permission to. If there are gates on the property, don't climb them, and leave them as you found them. Don't park, camp, or even spit where the landowner asks you not to. Don't ever litter on their property. After exiting the cave, let the landowner know what you've found – make them part of the project.
- Let someone know where you're going – it's not worth being trapped without anyone knowing where you are just to keep an exciting project secret.
- Check your caving gear before arriving on site, and especially before entering the cave. An hour into the cave isn't the time to discover that your light has been flickering and has now gone out because your batteries were corroded.
- Bring new friends caving! But please don't bring a friend caving who's never been before on a big trip that a bunch of other cavers made happen – say if a new borehole was found after you and some fellow project cavers spent weekends upon weekends digging open – not an okay time to bring along a newbie that didn't participate in the digging.
- In fact, don't bring anyone caving, no matter who qualified they may be, without first running it by the trip leader.
- You are responsible for anyone you invite, so make sure they're up to the trip.
- Consider that it may be appropriate to invite the cave owner along on the trip. If it were your cave, you'd want to be part of the project, right?
- Arrive on time. When you're late, you make the whole team wait.
- Bring a little extra. You've borrowed purification tablets or an energy bar before, so be ready to share the same with a friend.
- Be courteous when changing clothes before or after a cave trip, especially in regards to the gal driving down that dirt road you're changing next to, or the child that's looking at you out of the window of the cave owner's home.
- Whether it's packing up to hike up to the cave, head into the cave, or climb back out to the surface, compare packs to make sure everyone has comparable loads. It's not fair to the bolt climber that he should carry his drill, batteries, bolts, hammer, and 'biners when you only have a

sandwich and Gatorade in your pack. Of course, there's always the option of consolidating packs and taking turns carrying the one pack.

- Plan on how to deal with waste 'when nature calls' mid-trip. Many cave owners require that human waste, both liquid and solid, be containerized and brought out of the cave. There are products made with just this purpose in mind.

Traveling through the Cave

- Always, always, put safety first. Let it be known when you don't feel safe in the cave, for any reason. Don't harass anyone who asks for help, but absolutely harass anyone not practicing safe caving. Keep an eye on your companions. Fatigue is a dangerous thing.
- Regarding cave conservation, "take only pictures, leave only footprints, and kill only time" sums it up pretty well. Every cave you enter, every passage you go down, someone else will later want to enjoy as you did.
- When chatting with another caver, take care to avoid shining your bright head lamp into their eyes. Go ahead and admire the rest of their body!
- Stick to the elephant trail. Rarely seen caves are beautiful, and it should be one of our goals to keep them that way, so stick to the path. When you're off trail, STOP, and find your way back. In any case, this will help you avoid getting lost.
- Whenever you drop something that could potentially hurt or startle a caver below, shout, "Rock!" so that they can hide or prepare for the danger coming their way.
- Cave packs can get quite heavy, and there are awkward squeezes and climbs that are not safe, or even possible, to traverse with a pack. Never feel ashamed to ask someone to help you with a pack, and never decline anyone help with their pack. If you see anyone struggling with their pack, offer a hand. Think how much energy you've wasted before trying to find which of your pack straps is caught on that popcorn barb! And if someone helps you with your pack at any point in a cave, help the caver behind you with theirs through that same obstacle. Heck, even if the caver in front of you doesn't help you with your pack, you can help the person behind yourself. Or if you have a lighter pack for whatever reason, offer to trade packs for a while.
- Caves don't have signs posted at every intersection, so wait at every possibly confusing intersection. Even if the whole team knows the cave, it's good to stick together, and intersections are often larger areas that make good spots to wait. Drink water and have a snack while you're at it!
- It's not safe to have a team spread far apart while traveling through the cave, so as anyone not in the back of the group, it's your responsibility to help set the pace of travel. Check over your shoulder, and if you can't see a light, wait up!
- Always inspect rigging, no matter if you're the umpteenth to rig into it this trip. Check for unsafe rigging, loose bolts, cracking rock, rub points, frayed rope, or loose cobbles near the lip, and consider how the drop could be made easier or safer.
- Don't smoke in the cave – you can smell the odor for months afterwards.

- Respect the trip leader. If he or she calls the trip for ANY reason, support the trip leader, don't bash 'em in front of others. Sure, you may have traveled a way to partake in this trip, but it's the trip leader's trip, not yours.
- Be helpful and patient to photographers, because they may capture an image or two that you'll enjoy the rest of your life.

Surveying

- Survey as you go; don't scoop, no matter how tempting. It's no fun to be the one surveying what someone else scooped. In any case, when you survey as you explore, the excitement is drawn out and you'll make the most of the experience.
- Be patient with the sketcher. The sketcher normally establishes the pace of the survey, and that's okay.
- Give clear, concise data to the sketcher. Avoid saying things like, "the azimuth is 122... no it's more like 123... ah, let's make that 122.5." It wastes time, and it's never fun for the sketcher to have to use a mud-covered eraser!
- If a sketcher asks for distance to the tenths of a foot, don't give lengths to the hundredths' place—round it off yourself.
- Take "left, right, up, down" measurements based on what the cartographer will use to draw a cross section at that station, not to the nearest object in each direction. If you're right at a wall change, consider providing both distances, but be clear about it. Remember to take left and right measurements as you would see them going along the surveyed line, not back towards the way you surveyed from.
- The sketcher should repeat data provided to them, in a different format if possible (twelve vs. one-two). If the repeated value is correct, the data provider should acknowledge the fact.
- Naming caves and formations found there within is a blast! But you shouldn't always get to name everything your team finds. When it comes to cave names, utilize the historical or local name for the cave; if none exists, ask the landowner what he or she would prefer. As for cave formations or locations within a cave, whichever team finds it should get first dibs. Respect chosen names and don't rename things as you see fit.
- Respect other people's projects. If someone left a virgin passage going, let them have the first rights to return to it and continue the survey. If someone has been participating in a dig, trip after trip, continue to invite them, and don't survey the cave without offering them participation. If someone noted a very promising high lead in a trip report, don't climb up to it without asking them if they planned to return to it soon.
- When leaving a lead, well describe it in your notes so the next team doesn't forget to bring the required gear or wastes time looking along the floor for a lead that's really along the ceiling! Also, leave a well-marked station near the lead.

After Trip

- Cavers are volunteers and deserve due credit for the time they've exhausted for their passion. Make sure to list everyone on trip reports who participated in the trip. I'm a fan of even

thanking the armchair caver who provided me with a warm shower after my long trip. And always, if you're drawing a cave map, take care to list every surveyor that made your map a reality; even making a list of diggers that opened the cave, if applicable, is laudable. When sharing photographs, list everyone in the photo and credit the photographer and assistants.

- Don't share others' photographs or trip reports without asking their permission first.
- Be cognizant of the community gear that others have brought, that you dinged up, or that they're going to spend the time cleaning after the trip. Maybe offer some cash for rope or bolts permanently set in the cave, or call dibs on offering the gear next trip. Or if they're cleaning the community gear, perhaps you could be the one that takes the time to write up the trip report.
- Wash gear between caves. Even if WNS wasn't an issue, think of all of invasive species known and unknown that you could be transferring between environments.
- Don't give out cave locations, even as easy as it is to do on Facebook these days! People DO seek out caves on their own, often resulting in injuries and vandalism.

Miscellaneous

- Watch after older cavers, especially those in their seventies. Carry their packs whenever possible. Offer encouraging words and spot them on climbs (no matter how small). Listen politely as they tell old caving stories, even though you've heard them all before. Remember, it could be their last cave trip! (Note: this last item was 100% written by a Mr. Phil Lucas)