

The Front Royal Grotto New Caver Orientation Guide

“Take Nothing but Pictures,
Leave Nothing but Footprints,
Kill Nothing but Time”

I. General Rules of Caving Safely

- 1) Never Cave Alone: Caving alone is dangerous and foolhardy. A group of 3 or 4 is small enough to move quickly, yet big enough to allow flexibility in emergencies. If someone is injured, at least one person should stay with them while others go for help. (elaborate on optimum group size)
- 2) Make sure someone knows where you are going and when you are expected to return. Allow some leeway on return times since trips often take longer than expected, but having someone ready to call for help if your group is overdue is a wise precaution. (elaborate on having Cave Rescue phone numbers handy, etc.)
- 3) Each person participating in a trip should be physically and mentally capable of caving on that type of trip, whatever the level of expertise required. If you are unsure about your or someone else's physical or mental ability to handle a particular caving situation, bring it up with the trip leader. (elaborate on medical conditions and other limitations)
- 4) Dress for the conditions. Caves in our area are approx. 53 degrees F. Colder conditions may result from “cave wind”, cavers becoming wet, etc. Also see the Equipment section. (elaborate on hypothermia)
- 5) Always carry at least three sources of light. (elaborate on what counts as a light source incl those which provide heat)
- 6) Never exert yourself beyond your limits of endurance. Also never perform any maneuver that you are uncomfortable with. Speak to the trip leader if you are too tired to continue or unsure of your abilities.
- 7) Do not break up the group. (elaborate on exceptions)
- 8) Do not jump or run inside a cave

II. Equipment and Clothing

- 1) Helmets or hard hats with suspension, chin straps, and a mounted light source are mandatory. More than one light mounted on a helmet is handy in case your primary light goes out or you need extra light.
- 2) Light sources and supplies: in keeping with the “three lights” rule, you must have in your pack or on your person your extra lights and spare batteries, carbide, matches (for candles), etc.
- 3) Trash bag and/or space blanket for heat conservation. (elaborate on how to use either and where to carry them)
- 4) A cave pack is recommended over carrying gear in your pockets.

- 5) Clothing: Boots with good treads, gloves, knee pads and heavy clothing are advisable. Tennis shoes are a bad idea unless they are the rugged trail-running type. Coveralls are better than pants and shirt but it is up to you. Most experienced cavers in our area wear synthetic long underwear underneath nylon coveralls. This combination usually keeps the caver warmer and dryer than if they were wearing cotton. Also remember to have clean clothes for after caving. Nobody wants a muddy caver in their car!
- 6) Food: Bring your own! Energy food and/or candy is best but bring anything you like. It must be packaged to handle the rigors of caving (tupperware, etc.). Also bring your own drink (water, gatorade, soda, etc.)
- 7) All equipment should be checked and in working order before caving. Please consider the other cavers on your trip who have to sit and wait while you repair broken equipment, etc.

III. NSS Conservation Policy

The National Speleological Society believes:

- Caves have unique scientific, recreational, and scenic values
- These values are endangered by both carelessness and intentional vandalism
- These values, once gone, cannot be recovered
- The responsibility for protecting caves must be formed by those who study and enjoy them.

Accordingly, the intention of the Society is to work for the preservation of caves with a realistic policy supported by effective programs for: the encouragement of self-discipline among cavers; education and research concerning the causes and prevention of cave damage; and special projects, including cooperation with other groups similarly dedicated to the conservation of natural areas. Specifically:

All contents of a cave -- formations, life, and loose deposits -- are significant for their enjoyment and interpretation. Therefore, caving parties should leave a cave as they find it. They should provide means for the removal of waste; limit marking to a few, small, and removable signs as are needed for surveys; and, especially, exercise extreme care not to accidentally break or soil formations, disturb life forms or unnecessarily increase the number of disfiguring paths through an area.

Scientific collection is professional, selective, and minimal. The collecting of mineral or biological material for display purposes, including previously broken or dead specimens, is never justified, as it encourages others to collect and destroy the interest of the cave.

The Society encourages projects such as:

- Establishing cave preserves
- Placing entrance gates where appropriate
- Opposing the sale of speleothems

- Supporting effective protective measures
- Cleaning and restoring over-used caves
- Cooperating with private cave owners by providing them knowledge about their cave and assisting them in protecting their cave and property from damage during cave visits
- Encouraging commercial cave owners to make use of their opportunity to aid the public in understanding caves and the importance of their conservation.

Where there is reason to believe that publication of cave locations will lead to vandalism before adequate protection can be established, the Society will oppose such publication.

It is the duty of every Society member to:

Take personal responsibility for spreading a consciousness of the cave conservation problem to each potential user of caves. Without this, the beauty and value of our caves will not long remain with us.

For more information on cave conservation, check out the [The NSS Cave Conservation and Management Section WWW Page](#)

IV. NSS Landowner Relations Policy

Landowner relations – Good relationships between cavers and landowners are an essential part of visiting caves, and maintaining these relationships is a key element of responsible caving. Sadly, many landowners now prohibit people from entering their caves as a result of inconsiderate actions by cave visitors, and others have placed locked gates on their caves.

Observe these fundamental courtesies to receive permission to enter caves, to be welcomed as a guest in the future, and to keep caves open for other cavers.

Permission – Before entering a cave on private land, obtain the owner's permission; that's what you'd want people to do if you were the landowner. A local caver or members of an NSS grotto can probably help you make the proper contact.

Manners – Introduce yourself and the cavers with you to the cave owners. Spend some time chatting; you may need to persuade them that you are competent, conscientious cavers. Thank them for their hospitality. Visit them again after returning from their cave, unless it's after dark. Be quiet, especially at night. Leave gates as you find them, open or closed. Use gates, and avoid climbing fences. If you must climb over a fence, climb near a strong post. Avoid disturbing livestock and walking across a planted field. Replace barriers that were placed at the cave entrance to keep livestock from falling in. Many owners have never been in their own caves, so copies of photos and cave maps are often appreciated. You may meet owners who flatly will not allow you into their cave. In that case, thank them for their time and leave.

Discretion – If you change clothes before or after your cave trip, find a private, sheltered spot.

Leave no trace – Leave the cave and surface cleaner than you found it. Cause no damage to terrain or property.

Public Land – Although some caves controlled by public agencies may be entered without prior permission, some require a permit. Contact the agency in advance to ascertain what is necessary to enter a cave, and allow time for a response.

IV. Emergency

- 1) If all lights fail, wait in place. Since you told somebody where you are and when you should return, help will be on the way. Since you also have cave food and drink, as well as a trash bag or space blanket with which to keep warm, you should be in good shape to exit the cave under your own power when help arrives.
- 2) Emergency phone numbers for cave rescue: