

Cambridge University Caving Club

A Guide for Novice Caving

If you have decided or are wondering about going caving with CUCC, then the following information should be of some help. We find caving exciting and interesting; it is a completely new experience even for those that are used to climbing or other outdoor sports.

Cambridge happens to be one of the flattest areas you can find yourself in (just in case you had not noticed yet); thus CUCC caving trips in Britain will primarily take place in the Yorkshire Dales, Peak District, South Wales and in the Mendips. Half way through term you'll be desperate to get out of Cambridge and these areas provide a perfect change of scenery. Throughout the year weekend trips (Friday to Sunday night) will take place in these areas and by the end of the year you should be acquainted with most of these caving "hot spots".

As the year progresses the caving trips will become longer and more technical, which is why coming on an introductory meet is strongly recommended to gain experience. It's also an excellent time to meet people. The first novice trip will actually be half a weekend (Saturday evening to Sunday night) and should give an excellent taster of what is to come.

Although previous experience in terms of climbing or even caving might be helpful, it is not required and complete beginners are very welcome. It is, however, important that adults who seek to go caving are aware of, and accept the element of risk and therefore take responsibility for their own actions, not simply relying on more experienced members. It should be said at this point that caving (and CUCC in particular) does have a very good safety record.

What follows are some practical guidelines which will help you prepare for a weekend and help us ensure your safety.

Meeting up...

Basic details such as when and where trips are occurring will be present on the CUCC website (<http://www.srcf.ucam.org/caving/>). More detailed information will be presented at the weekly pub meets. These occur on Tuesdays at the Castle Inn (on Castle Street, up from Magdalene Bridge) from 9pm onwards. Coming to the pubmeets is highly encouraged as more detailed plans for the following weekend will be discussed.

Once registered on the e-mail lists you will receive all the current and up to date information relating to departure times and transport allocations.

The pub meet is also a good time to bring along cheques, made out to "Cambridge University Caving Club", for the weekends. Costs range around £25-£30, most of which is spent on providing transport. Alternatively money can be sent via ICMS (inter-collegiate mail service—this is free) to Jess Hatchett at Clare College.

Setting off...

Regardless of whether we are planning to set off on Friday or Saturday night, we will meet beforehand outside the tackle store, which is the garage to the left of 6 Grange Road.

Usually we will meet up sometime between 5.00 and 6.30pm. However, please try to be there at the time planned beforehand in the pub as it isn't fun for anyone stuck waiting.

Equipment and safety-critical tackle

At the Tackle Store you will be issued with all the equipment you will need. This can be tried on to see if it fits, but it might be useful to know things like your shoe size in advance.

You'll be given:

- A 'furry' or fleece undersuit
- An oversuit
- Welly boots
- Wide cell belt (formerly called a belay belt)
- Helmet
- Light
- Knee pads
- A bag to fit it all in

Depending on the type of trip you might also be issued with:

- Harness
- SRT (ropework) kit

Note: we will expect you to wash your gear, especially the undersuit and oversuit, after the weekend. Equipment such as wellies and the kneepads just need to be rinsed e.g. with a hose or in the bath. This needn't take long if you don't leave it mouldering in coagulated mud for a week :-)

Personal gear / stuff to bring

- Swimwear / old underwear (“shreddies”) – so named because caving destroys them and colours them nicely in irremovable brown stains.
- Walking socks / wetsuit socks for wearing underground.
- High energy bars for in the cave: Mars bars, Snickers and the like are particularly popular to give that extra boost of sugar.
- T-shirt – some argue this is more comfortable / warmer under the main caving suit. Alternatively thermal underwear might also be a good substitute.
- Sleeping bag – a 2-3 season one is recommended: some of the caving huts can be a bit cold in the winter.
- Towel / usual toiletry items.
- Waterproof coat and decent footwear – it can often be quite muddy/wet even when not in the cave if the weather is bad.
- Washing up gloves for caving – some claim this is warmer, while others swear the opposite and don’t wear any. Regardless, they might prevent rocks scratching your hands too much.
- A spare set of warm clothes including fleece/jumper etc.
- Hiking gear – you might like to take a day off from caving. The areas in which the caves are located are ideal for walking trips.

The club provides food, but we might stop by for a pint at a pub after the caving trips (to chat about all the day’s ordeals!). On the drive up or back we tend to stop for a curry or chips, so you should bring some money for this.

The fun bit . . . CAVING!

The team

On introductory trips a trip leader will be appointed. He/she will be of sufficient experience to lead the trip and must be reasonably confident of the abilities and experience of the members of the party to safely complete the trip, as well as being confident that adequate tackle has been taken. Normally a seconder will also be chosen who is also able to lead the trip should it be necessary.

Just like you, they are here to have fun and any concerns or questions should be directed to them as soon as possible. Trip length and difficulty are geared to suit the individuals going on the trip so there should be no need to worry and only time to enjoy oneself.

CUCC sees formal leadership systems as undesirable in recreational caving conducted by adults. The essence of caving should be individual competence and companionship of friends,

unfettered by unnecessary rules and regulations. Therefore on subsequent trips no-one in particular is designated as the leader. It is up to everyone on a trip to make sure that they are all up to it, and to look out for each other. Participants should not be afraid to make the more experienced members of the group aware of any problems they may perceive. Caves should be chosen to be suitable for all the participants.

Safety

The caving gear and you

- Check that your helmet, wide cell belt and harness (if you have one) are in good condition. Please **ask** us if you have any queries. In the interest of safety, please make sure your harness is adjusted to your size, and that the buckles are doubled back.
- Check that your light turns on and off on the main and pilot settings.
- Check that your boots fit comfortably.
- Your suit will feel tight the first time you wear it, but this should improve whilst caving. If you are still unsure about the fit, ask sooner rather than later.

“The first time I tried to put on my caving gear, I felt like I didn’t know my left from my right and everything was a jumble. It can be confusing first time round but I assure you that everyone has had the same problem and we will help you put it on and explain what goes where.”

In the cave

Prior to the trip, a brief outline of what is to be expected will be given. Novice trips tend to last between 2-6 hours, and subsequent trips rarely last more than eight hours. If at any time during this period you decide that this is not for you, or you do not want to do a climb down etc., then **say so**.

Caves can be intimidating environments first time round and we prefer it if you tell us immediately if you would like to go back. Nobody will laugh or think you odd.

Caving has a very low accident rate and cave rescues are rare, but difficult. Even something simple like a sprained ankle can add hours to a cave trip as it is not an easy environment to move around and operate in. Thus if you are feeling tired, or ill, or simply want to go back **tell us**, we don’t bite!

Remember, we are going caving to have a good time and some fun: it is not a competitive sport. You will be told of potential hazards e.g. squeezes, water hazards, false floors, pitches (vertical drops) and climbs.

Please do follow instructions carefully as the leader will understand the situation and the necessary response. But remember: caving does have an element of risk, and the more

experienced members of the group will not be able to warn you of every hazard, so pay attention and check that what you are doing seems sensible.

All relevant techniques related to ascending or descending pitches will be explained on the trip if not before and the team leaders will help you with attaching karabiners (krabs), harnesses and other necessary equipment. Normally, above ground training such as ladder and rope (SRT) techniques, will be practiced before hand.

Caves are generally wet and cold environments and there may be a slight risk of hypothermia. Another possible hazard in some caves is caused by Weil's disease, which has flu-like symptoms and can be fatal. Again the chances of actually catching it are tiny. If you would like more information about these risks, see the Appendix to this document – we strongly advise reading it.

All trips have a “call out time” using standard procedures ensuring other reliable parties are aware of who is on the trip, where we are and when we are expecting to be back.

Cave conservation

Obviously leaving litter on the way to, from or in the cave ruins the experience for others, so don't.

Some caves have been heavily used, nevertheless caves may still have beautiful formations in them which may range from mud deposits to limestone formations such as stalactites / stalagmites, curtains and straws. Be very careful with these as they take a very great number of years to form, and can become permanently damaged if they come in contact with mud or the oils on your skin.

Remember to watch where you put your head when standing up, and point out pretties to other people, both to protect and to look at them. Try your very hardest not to break them or put muddy hands on them.

Personal details and information

All novices must have signed that they have read and understood the contents of this document.

As an additional condition of becoming a member or temporary member of CUCC, the information requested on the last page of this document must be completed.

Agreement must be made for that information and information regarding financial transactions between yourself and the Club to be stored on paper and/or computer by officers of the Club, for the information on last page of this document to be passed on to insurers, and for financial records to be passed on to the University of Cambridge if requested or when necessary, and for your financial details to be passed onto other members of CUCC where required for accounting purposes.

Contacts

We can't expect to cover everything in this document, but hopefully it will have also have convinced you that caving is exciting and adventurous and that you can expect to have a great time.

For more information (any questions, however bizarre are welcome) contact any of the following people:

| | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|-------------------|
| Ollie Stevens | oacs2@cam.ac.uk | President |
| Jess Hatchett | jlh76@cam.ac.uk | Junior Treasurer |
| Jess Stirrups | jas235@cam.ac.uk | Secretary |
| John Billings | jnb26@cam.ac.uk | Webmaster |
| Edvin Deadman | ed259@cam.ac.uk | Meets Secretary |
| Matt Wallen | mw439@cam.ac.uk | Tackle Master |
| Martin Jahnke and Laurence Aitchison | lja22@cam.ac.uk | Training Officers |
| Kathryn Hopkins | kh311@cam.ac.uk | Librarian |

Appendix

Hypothermia

Hypothermia is the name of the condition that occurs when your core body temperature falls below 35°C. It is a serious condition that can be fatal.

In any outdoor activity in which you can get wet and/or cold it is important to know and to recognise the signs of hypothermia and act accordingly to combat them. Caves, especially in the UK can be both cold and wet and as you may be a few hours into a long trip, knowing the signs of hypothermia is particularly important.

Whilst caving you always work together in a team and it is just as important for you to recognise the signs of hypothermia in other cavers, especially those less experienced than yourself, as well as noticing should you develop the symptoms as well.

The symptoms of hypothermia are: shivering (normally only in the early stages), cold, clammy and pale skin, tiredness, confusion, difficult and slow speech, a slow faint pulse, slow breathing and lowered levels of responsiveness (eventually leading to unconsciousness then death). Not all casualties who have hypothermia shiver, especially in the later stages, as the body only uses shivering to prevent mild heat loss.

There are several things you can do to combat hypothermia. Understandably a lot of this advice won't be viable whilst underground as the necessary resources won't be available, but the information is useful both when out of the cave and for treating hypothermia in general.

For a mobile casualty who is becoming cold, try to keep them dry and dressed in warm, dry clothing whenever possible. Give them extra clothing to wear if it is available and remove wet clothing if possible. Evacuate them from the cave to warmth and safety as soon as possible.

Reheating should be by gradual rewarming through extra clothing and indirect heat, rather than by direct means such as rubbing of the skin or a hot water bottle. This is because direct heat sources near the skin draw blood vessels towards the skin leading to potential further heat loss, a drop in blood pressure and putting extra strain on the heart. It is important that the chest and upper abdomen are kept warm, as well as the head.

For an injured or extremely cold casualty: **Cave Rescue** should be called immediately by dialling 999 and asking for the Police and explaining that you require Cave Rescue. The casualty should be covered in extra layers of dry clothing and placed in a survival bag. It is particularly important to ensure that warm layers (e.g. clothing, a blanket or a spare survival bag) are placed between the casualty and the ground, as much heat loss is through conduction with the cold ground. The casualty's whole body should be covered including the head. Continual talking giving reassurance to the casualty always helps to keep them positive and responsive. It also provides you with a means of constantly assessing a casualty.

Weil's Disease (Leptospirosis)

Leptospirosis is an infection caused by the *leptospira* bacterium, which if left untreated can cause severe damage to body organs and jaundice. When it reaches this late and severe stage it is commonly known as "Weil's Disease". Of those who contract the infection each year, nearly all completely recover with treatment. The infection is often carried by animals (including cattle) and rodents (especially rats), and is excreted in their urine into waterways. The infection can be caught through a whole variety of activities in which you may come into substances infected by the bacterium.

In caving, it is important to know the symptoms and the seriousness of Weil's Disease *even though the chances of catching it are tiny*, as treatment for any infection must be caught early. It is especially important if you have been caving in an area where caves are in close proximity to farmyards and the like.

The leptospirosis infection resembles a cold or influenza (flu) infection in the initial stage and has an incubation period of 4 to 10 days with symptoms lasting for up to 3 weeks. The early symptoms are: fever, chills, muscular aches and pains, loss of appetite and nausea when lying down. **These can easily be mistaken for influenza, meningitis or a common fever of unknown origin.** The fever lasts for approximately five days then significant deterioration in the later stages occurs.

Do not be afraid to go to a doctor if you are concerned about early possible symptoms, and impress upon them that you may have been exposed to the bacterium.

The symptoms of the later stages of the infection may also include: bruising of the skin, anaemia, sore eyes, nosebleeds and jaundice.

IF YOU CONTRACT ANY OF THESE LATER STAGE SYMPTOMS AFTER HAVING WHAT WAS BELIEVED TO BE FLU OR A COMMON COLD, THEN YOU MUST GO TO YOUR LOCAL HOSPITAL'S ACCIDENT AND EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT STRAIGHT AWAY AND TELL THEM YOU COULD HAVE LEPTOSPIROSIS. IF LEFT UNTREATED AT THIS POINT IT COULD BE FATAL.

Several steps can be taken to lower the risk of infection. Firstly, when above ground, avoid whenever possible swimming or wading through any stagnant pools of water. Secondly, footwear should be worn at all times. Finally, both above ground and whilst caving, all cuts and grazes should be covered by waterproof plasters.

Full Name:

Address:

Telephone Number:

Email:

Your College/department and University:

Should an emergency arise, your Cambridge College or University will be informed in the first instance via our Senior Treasurer. If you are not affiliated to a College in Cambridge or to another University, please provide below the name and contact details of you next-of-kin whom we may contact in the event of an emergency.

Declaration

I hereby agree for the information above and information regarding financial transactions between myself and the Club to be stored on paper and/or computer by officers of the Club, for the information on this form to be passed on to insurers, and for financial records to be passed on to the University of Cambridge if requested or when necessary, and for my financial details to be passed onto other members of CUCC where required for accounting purposes.

I also undertake that if I have any medical conditions that may be relevant to the safety of a caving trip, that I will tell appropriate people on the trip before going underground.

Signed:

Date: