

SAFETY

A PLAN TO BE SAFE

- A** Always include experienced cavers in the party.
- P** Pick a cave or pothole within everyone's capabilities and know the route to avoid becoming lost.
- L** Leave a note of your trip and latest time of return with a responsible person. Confirm your safe exit.
- A** Ask local experts for advice and act on it.
- N** Never cave alone without considerable experience and taking advanced safety precautions.
- T** Take notice of the local weather forecast and ground conditions. Flooding can happen very quickly and violently.
- O** One reliable headlamp for each person. Without light you are trapped.
- Boots, helmet and warm clothes are essential.
- B** Emergency lights, food, first aid kit and survival bag or blanket should always be taken.
- E** See that ropes, ladders and belays are inspected and rigged properly before hanging your life on them; check the rope is long enough and knotted at the lower end.
- S** Accident underground is always easy, rescue is difficult, sometimes impossible.
- F** Falls, loose boulders, rising water and exposure cause most accidents.
- E** Exit can take more effort than entry - plan with the return in mind.

The BCA recognises that cave and mine exploration are activities with a danger of personal injury or death. Participants in these activities should be aware of and accept these risks and be responsible for their own actions and involvement.



The **BRITISH CAVING ASSOCIATION** is the successor to the National Caving Association, (first set up in 1969) and is recognised by the UK Sports Council as the National Governing Body for caving in Great Britain. It is a federation of Regional Caving Councils, National Bodies with specialist interests, Caving Clubs and Individual Members.

The **REGIONAL CAVING COUNCILS** cover a number of loosely-defined regions which together cover the whole of Great Britain; each includes at least one major and some minor caving areas. They are the bodies which look after the practical aspects of access and conservation locally. Caving Clubs are linked to the regional council covering their area(s) of interest through their membership of BCA. Some of the regional councils and specialist organisations have both individual and group membership.

There is no Scottish Council of Caving, but some Scottish caving clubs are members of the Council of Northern Caving Clubs. The Speleological Union of Ireland is not part of BCA.

The **NATIONAL BODIES WITH SPECIALIST INTERESTS** are:

- **BRITISH CAVE RESCUE COUNCIL** provides liaison between the independent Cave Rescue Organisations, the Home Office, The Police and the Mountain Rescue Council. Each Cave Rescue Organisation is responsible for its own area organisation and draws its rescue teams from volunteer cavers active in the area.
- **BRITISH CAVE RESEARCH ASSOCIATION** is the charitable arm of BCA whose primary object is to encourage all aspects of research in caves and karst areas, to further the development of caving equipment and technology and to publish the results of such work.
- **CAVE DIVING GROUP** represents the interests of Cave Divers, provides the necessary specialist training for cave diving (which is potentially far more hazardous than open water diving) and sets safety standards for cave diving proficiency.
- **NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF MINING HISTORY ORGANISATIONS** represents organisations such as mining history societies and mining museums which are concerned with the exploration of, research in and preservation of abandoned mines in the UK.
- **WILLIAM PENGELLY CAVE STUDIES TRUST** is the only body concerned with scientific cave study whose role is primarily devoted to education and conservation rather than research.
- **ASSOCIATION OF CAVING INSTRUCTORS** is the specialist organisation which represents the interests of those cavers who are holders of the Cave Instructors Certificate.

Current addresses for the Secretaries of all these organisations are available from:

BRITISH CAVING ASSOCIATION,
The Old Methodist Chapel, Great Hucklow,
Buxton, Derbyshire. SK17 8RG
Website <http://www.british-caving.org.uk>

So, You Want To Go Caving?

CONSERVATION

Caves are one of the most fascinating environments known to Man where it is still possible to participate in original exploration. They have taken thousands of years to evolve their fantastic shapes, and crystal & clay formations.

Long slender straws, just able to support their own weight, and solid, stumpy stalagmites arrayed across the rocky floor are just two types of calcite formations that may greet a visitor to this unique natural world. Untrampled clay floors remain as pristine as the day ancient floodwaters last receded. A world that, whether you are the first to enter or not, will leave an unforgettable impression.

Unfortunately, very few people are able to experience this remarkable environment so it is imperative that all our caves stay as undamaged as possible to ensure their conservation for future visitors.

CAVE CONSERVATION CODE

Caves are a special and rare environment, some more so than others, and parts of some more so than others. Active stream passages and potholes with fast moving water may have very little that can be accidentally damaged by the passage of a caver, but fossil cave passages where streams never flow are likely to contain all sorts of delicate remains that could easily be damaged by the path of a single thoughtless caver. Where there is a risk of artificial damage, whilst passing delicate straw stalactites, or sand banks, or a crystal pool for example, you should slow down, look carefully around and take extreme care. All these features are easily damaged and cannot be repaired. The following is a carefully considered CODE intended to minimise damage to caves. Please read it and try to follow it whenever you go caving. Thank you.

Cave with caution and within your own ability and experience

Keep your party size appropriate to the cave you are visiting

Observe and keep to taped routes

Do not touch formations or other delicate items

Keep away from bats or other life

Never dig without proper consent

Never interfere with scientific equipment

Leave no litter or pollution

Take nothing out of a cave

Take photographs with care

HINTS & TIPS

- Carry at least one spare lamp in your team: poor or no light combined with fatigue can cause unnecessary damage to the cave or yourself.
- Damage to stalagmite formations, mud floors, rimstone pools and graffiti on walls is vandalism: help prevent it.
- Why not participate in a cave conservation scheme: collect litter, clean off graffiti, etc.?
- Natural caves and old mines are part of our natural heritage; help protect them for yourself and others.

WHERE CAN I GO CAVING?

In Britain almost all caving takes place in areas where the rock is a form of limestone; the main caving areas are shown on the map below - so you may have to be prepared to travel quite a long way to go caving.

- A** Yorkshire Dales
- B** Peak District
- C** South Wales
- D** Forest of Dean
- E** Mendip Hills
- F** South Devon
- G** Assynt

Other areas of interest to cavers can be found in north west Scotland (in Durness and Appin), North Wales, the Northern Pennines, Furness, South Yorkshire, North Nottinghamshire, North East Cheshire, the Isle of Skye and Ireland. Cornwall, Cumbria and a few other areas have metalliferous mines which are also of interest to cavers and mining historians.



WHAT SHALL I WEAR?

For your first trip you should be able to borrow a lamp and helmet until you decide whether you want to go caving again. You may be able to borrow some other specialist clothes, such as a waterproof oversuit, and other gear. However, don't worry if you can't, the following will be suitable for a first trip.

HELMET

With a Y chin-strap and lamp bracket.

LAMP

Any reliable lamp can be used providing it can be attached to your helmet to leave your hands free.

OLD WARM CLOTHES

Perhaps pullover, woolly socks and tracksuit trousers. (Jeans are NOT suitable as they drag when they get wet.)

WATERPROOF JACKET & OVER TROUSERS

These can be covered with a boiler suit or 'overall' to protect them.

BOOTS

Wellingtons with non-slip treads are best, otherwise boots without hooks for laces. (Trainers are NOT suitable.)

JOINING A CLUB

For most cavers, joining a club is the only way that they can go caving regularly and safely. Clubs provide an opportunity to meet other people with the same interests, where up-to-date knowledge can be shared.

Clubs often have a hostel in a caving area with reciprocal arrangements with club hostels in other regions. They arrange 'meets' or caving trips as well as evenings in their local home town and they may also have a library and a store of equipment for the use of members.

For a beginner, the best clubs to join are those which have a training programme involving surface practice and beginners' meets. Some clubs expect people to join in with normal trips where some previous experience is advisable.

For legal reasons most clubs have a minimum age for joining. This is usually eighteen although some allow young people to join at the age of sixteen, so it is best to check.

Information on clubs who are members of the British Caving Association may be obtained from the BCA's postal address, by email or from its web site: see overleaf.

However, you may find it more helpful to contact one of the regional councils of caving who keep up-to-date lists of clubs who cave in their regions. (BCA can provide up-to-date addresses for the regional councils too.) If you write to BCA itself or to one of its member organisations, you should always enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

LEARNING TO CAVE SAFELY

Following an introduction in straightforward caves, the next step is to learn the basic skills and techniques which allow you to visit caves safely.

Many caving clubs will offer training to new members and there are a number of commercial instructors with BCA recognised qualifications who offer training for a variable charge. The regional councils of caving also arrange courses in their regions and these may enable you to meet other cavers or contact a local club.

Details of such instructors and courses can be found in the caving press in magazines such as 'DESCENT'. Remember that centres offering courses to people under the age of eighteen must now be registered under the Adventure Centres (Young Persons' Safety) Act 1995.

If you require further details on training you can contact the BCA Training Officer via BCA's central address.