



British Caving Association

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Am I fit enough?

This is a question many people ask themselves ahead of a training or assessment course, so we've written some guidance to help you assess your own fitness and understand what's required of a leader.

The BCA promotes a rounded approach to fitness as a leader that includes both physical and mental resilience. In this regard, the focus for candidates should be on completing **Quality Trips** (these can be found in the syllabus for each award)

The definitions of Quality Trips for each qualification ensure that candidates experience varied weather conditions, and cover different types of terrain e.g. streamways, boulder chokes, mud etc. The planning, execution and evaluation of these Quality Days provides opportunities to develop the necessary **physical fitness, resilience** and **decision-making skills**.

Candidates need to demonstrate that they can lead a quality trip with the physical and mental fitness required to deal with an emergency or other unforeseen situation, on top of the demands of the day. This requires stamina to lead others through the range of conditions that can be experienced and sufficient pace and agility to provide safety for their group. Candidates will be assessed against these criteria and not against each other.

Whereas there is no required minimum speed during training or assessment for any of the qualifications, candidates should not attend a course or assessment if they are ill or injured, to a degree that they can't easily cope with the demands of the course.

During the assessment, candidates must demonstrate competence in key areas of the syllabus; including navigation, security on steep ground (or rope rescues for vertical leaders), hazard identification and management within the scope of the awards. Candidates should be physically capable of performing these core skills throughout a typical day's activity, relative to the most challenging venue they intend to lead groups in.

With regards rope rescues candidates would be expected to perform a rescue within a reasonable time, that being such that it would not expose a casualty to further injury such as suspension trauma (<https://british-caving.org.uk/suspension-trauma/>).

Here are some key factors to consider regarding fitness for a BCA Leader qualification:

Endurance

Caving and Mine Exploration activities often involve sustained physical effort over extended periods. Building cardiovascular endurance through activities like walking, running, cycling, or swimming can be beneficial.

Strength and muscular endurance

Developing overall body strength, particularly in the legs, core, and upper body, is important for navigating steep and/or challenging terrain.

Incorporating strength training exercises, such as bodyweight exercises, weightlifting or resistance training, can help improve muscular endurance.

Balance and coordination

Maintaining good balance and coordination is crucial for traversing uneven surfaces and negotiating obstacles. Activities like yoga, Pilates, or specific balance training exercises can help improve these skills.

Mobility

Improving your mobility allows for greater control which reduces the risk of injury. Incorporating functional mobility exercises and activities like yoga or Pilates into your routine can help improve the way you move.

Mental resilience

Outdoor environments can present unpredictable and challenging situations. Developing mental resilience, including the ability to stay focused, make sound decisions, and manage stress, is important for safe and enjoyable outdoor experiences.

Ultimately, the most specific approach is to gradually build your fitness level over time through regular Caving and Mine Exploration activities relevant to the scheme you plan to undertake. If your time in accessing these environments is limited, then choose exercise activities that simulate the demands of outdoor environments. This allows you to develop the necessary physical and mental capabilities to make the most of your course.