

Spelunking/Caving



Council Approval: Required

Activity Permitted For: J C S A

Not Recommended For: D B

Certificate of Insurance (COI) is required from vendor providing this activity if renting or using a guide. Visit <https://www.girlscoutsni.org/resources#COI> to check list of the COIs on file or to request one.

Troop Trip Travel Form may need to be completed.

About Spelunking

Spelunking, or caving, is an exciting, hands-on way to learn about speleology, the study of caves, as well as paleontology, which is the study of life from past geologic periods by examining plant and animal fossils. As a sport, caving resembles rock climbing and often involves using ropes to crawl and climb up cavern nooks and through crannies. This type of caving is not permitted for Daisies and Brownies. However, this restriction does not apply to groups taking trips to tourist or commercial caves, which often include safety features such as paths, electric lights, stairways, expert guides etc.

Never go into a cave alone. Never go caving with fewer than four people in your group. Appoint a reliable, experienced caver as the “trail guide” or “sweeper” whose job it is to keep the group together. When climbing in a cave, always use three points of contact, hands, feet, knees, and, possibly, the seat of your pants (the cave scoot).

Learn More:

- U.S. caving clubs: [National Speleological Society](#)
- White-nose syndrome in bat populations: [White Nose Syndrome](#)
- [National Caves Association](#)
- Guide to responsible caving: [American Cave Conservation Association](#)

Include Girl Scout Members with Disabilities

Communicate with girls of all abilities and/or their caregivers to assess any needs and accommodations. Check with public, governmental, and tourist caves about their accessibility provisions. Learn about the resources and information that [Disabled Sports USA](#) provides people with disabilities.

Equity

In addition to physical and social-emotional disabilities consider the history, culture, and past experiences of the Girl Scout members in your troop that could affect their ability to equally participate in an activity. Work with members and families to understand how an activity is perceived. Ensure that all Girl Scout members and their families feel comfortable that they have access to whatever is needed to fully participate such as the proper equipment, prior experiences and skills needed to enjoy the activity.

Safety Activity Checkpoints

Standard Safety Guidelines. Refer to the Standard Safety Guidelines at the beginning of Safety Activity Checkpoints which apply to all Girl Scout gatherings and activities. When the adult-to-girl ratio, or other safety parameters, are stricter for a specific activity than in the Standard Safety Guidelines always follow the stricter parameters in the activity chapter.

COVID-19 Guidelines. Review the Coronavirus Safety in Girl Scouts section under the Standard Safety Guidelines. Be certain to consult your council's specific COVID-19 guidance which can be accessed under the same section. Always call ahead to the vendor, property or facility involved to check for their COVID-19 safety requirements as you prepare to take girls for this activity.

Emergency Action Plan (EAP). Review and document your Emergency Action Plan (EAP) ahead of time before taking girls out for this activity. Think through scenarios of what can go wrong such as an accident, physical injury to a girl or adult, missing girl, or sudden illness.

Verify instructor knowledge and experience. A guide with documented experience in cave exploration should accompany the group into the cave. A guide can also help decide which caves are suitable. Pre-trip instruction should be given by an adult with documented experience according to your council's guidelines.

Select a safe site. Obtain guidance from a local chapter of the National Speleological Society to select a cave to explore. Never explore a cave without a guide and without written permission from the site owner/operator. Check with your Girl Scout council for approval if needed.

Compile key contacts. See "Introduction to *Safety Activity Checkpoints*" for information.

Educate in advance. Girls should learn about basic caving guidelines before planning a caving trip and they must understand safety procedures and know how to handle equipment. Caves are fragile and sensitive environments, and they need to recognize and use resistant surfaces for travel. If no latrine is available, pack out all human waste, solids, and fluids. The smallest food crumbs can impact cave environments, so choose less crumbly foods such as nuts and chewy energy bars.

Dress appropriately for the activity. Make sure girls and adults avoid wearing dangling earrings, bracelets, and necklaces that may become entangled in equipment.

Prepare for emergencies. Ensure the presence of a waterproof first-aid kit and a first aider with a current certificate in first aid, including adult and child CPR or CPR/AED, who is prepared to handle cases of soft tissue and bone injury and hypothermia. If any part of the activity is located 30 minutes or more from emergency medical services, ensure the presence of a first aider with wilderness first aid.

Get a weather report. See “Introduction to *Safety Activity Checkpoints*” Also, in wet weather, avoid caves with stream passages, as some caves can flood.

Safety Gear

- Properly fitting safety helmet with a strong chin strap. For horizontal caves, bump helmets may be used; for vertical caves, use safety helmets carrying the Union of International Alpine Association (UIAA) seal, which is located on the inside of the helmet. It is recommended that a disposable liner, such as a shower cap or surgical cap, be worn underneath the helmet to protect against the spread of head lice.
- Sturdy boots with ankle protection (hiking boots for dry areas; rubber boots or wellies for wet caves)
- Warm, rubber gloves (to keep hands warm and protect against cuts and abrasions)
- Long pants and shirt with long sleeves
- Extra set of clothes
- Non-perishable, high-energy foods, such as fruits and nuts
- Water
- Knee and elbow pads
- Water-resistant “wet socks” (for wet caves)
- Belt and harness
- Compass
- Three sources of light: the main light should be electric and mounted on the safety helmet, while the other two light sources may be flashlights.
- Spare bulbs and batteries
- A trash bag (use as a poncho or for covering dirty equipment after the caving activity; cavers keep an empty trash bag in their safety helmets)