

The Kansas City Area Grotto Policy On: **GROUPS REQUESTING CAVE TRIPS**

Final Draft
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It is the policy of the Kansas City Area Grotto (herein referred to as “Grotto”) that requests by groups or organizations (herein referred to as “Group”) for cave trips are at the complete discretion of the Grotto, or any representative of the Grotto. At any time a trip request can be declined or canceled if it does not meet the full and complete satisfaction of either the Grotto, or any representative of the Grotto. No representative of the Grotto is under any obligation to act as a trip leader or assist the trip leader to take a group caving if the representative feels in any way unsatisfied with the group, its individuals, its leaders, its preparations or conditions of the trip. Furthermore, any Grotto representative is given the authority to deny any individual’s participation in the trip, at their sole discretion. Failure of any group leader to comply with and support decisions pertaining to trip participants made by any representative will result in immediate cancellation of the trip.

The National Speleological Society and the Boy Scouts of America have established policy and guidelines pertaining to Cave exploring. The policy and guidelines are attached and will be followed for all Scouting requests. This policy will also serve as the basis for any other groups or organizations requesting trips. **All Scout groups are required to have an approved tour permit for trips of all kinds. Caving activities are included under that plan. National tour permits are required for a trip of 250 miles or more; local permits are issued to cover shorter trips.** The Grotto, its representatives, landowners, or agencies may require additional permits, liability waivers, or other documentation to be completed. Any and all necessary permits required by a group’s organization to participate in trips and/or activities are the sole responsibility of the group leader. Proof of properly secured and/or completed forms may be requested by the Grotto or its representative and must be satisfactory.

If a group requests the Grotto to assist them with a caving experience, the Grotto may offer or require an opportunity to meet with the group wishing to participate in the caving experience. This can provide an educational opportunity for the group to learn about caves and caving properly and will include the information on the attached Educational Content Outline. Such a meeting can also be an opportunity to answer any questions as well as provide a chance for a Grotto representative to meet and evaluate the group prior to going caving. This may take more than one meeting. If participants are minors, it is strongly encouraged, and may be required by any representative of the Grotto that a legally responsible adult is present at the meeting before a minor is permitted to participate in a caving experience.

If a Grotto representative agrees to take a group on a caving experience, the group leaders must understand and agree to the following conditions at all times:

- ? The group leader, not the Grotto, its representatives, agencies or land owners involved, remains fully accountable and responsible for the group at all times in the course of the caving experience, including but not limited to areas or individuals whose property is used for camping and/or access to a cave. No one can remove or discharge the group leader from responsibility for the group.
- ? Any Grotto representative assisting the group in a caving experience is functioning as a resource person. As the grotto has been requested to assist a group with a caving experience, it is presumed that the group is seeking the greater experience and knowledge of veteran cavers. Therefore, during the caving experience a Grotto representative will function as a trip leader or guide.
- ? The trip leader must have full and complete authority over the group while caving and while making decisions related to the trip, participation, and cancellation. **This does not remove responsibility from the group leader for the group. The trip may be cancelled at anytime up to or during the trip by either the group leader or the trip leader without any further need to justify the decision.**
- ? The Grotto requires that any non member (or their legal guardian) participating in any way associated with a trip, complete and sign a release form indicating their understanding that caving is a hazardous activity. Due to remote locations, access to medical resources and other emergency assistance may be limited or delayed; and serious injury or death is always a real consideration. By signing the release form, each individual acknowledges and accepts these risks, and accepts responsibility for their own safety, thereby releasing the Grotto and its representatives, agencies, and landowners involved in any way associated with any activity arranged with the Grotto or its representatives.

By signing below I indicate that I have received, read, and understood the Kansas City Area Grotto Policy on Groups Requesting Cave Trips. I agree to comply with this.

This form is to be signed by the Group Leader, and returned to the Trip Leader prior to any trip actually taking place.

X _____
Group Leader Signature Date Printed Name

Group Name (Please Print)

**THE NATIONAL SPELEOLOGICAL SOCIETY POLICY ON:
CAVE EXPLORING BY SCOUT AND EXPLORER GROUPS**

A. GENERAL POLICY

1. **Cave exploring can be a hazardous activity** when the proper equipment, skills, and judgment are not used. Trips that are led by adults inexperienced in cave exploring and trips containing large numbers of persons compound the hazards already inherent in the activity and create a potentially dangerous situation.
2. All cave exploring, other than simple novice activities should be limited, as is the case with mountaineering and scuba diving, to high-school-age **youth 14 years of age and older**—Explorer Posts and older Scouts in troops.
3. Explorer posts and other groups which include cave visits in their program, whether for one trip or many, **must be under the leadership of a responsible, mature adult who is constantly present** with the group. The leader must be highly qualified through both training and experience in cave exploring and must be thoroughly versed in all established safety practices, conservation measures, and courtesy to cave owners.
4. In conformity with the BSA policy on the use of wilderness areas, **all caving groups should be limited to 8 to 10 persons including at least one adult leader**. Mass-type caving activities should not be conducted. Each group should be organized to function independently, i.e., plan own trips on different dates, provide its own transportation and food, and function as a separate and distinct group. The only exception to these rules should be certain commercial caves where special provisions are made to furnish proper supervision by professional guides.

NOTE: Caving trips have been incorporated in the BSA "Policy on Use of Wilderness Areas by Personnel of the BSA" with a cross-reference to these guidelines. Copies of the wilderness area policy statement are available from High Adventure Programs, Boy Scouts of America, 1325 Walnut Hill Lane, Irving, TX 75062-1296.

5. Any Explorer post wishing to learn about cave rescue work or pursue that activity as a specialty must do so under the sponsorship and supervision of an adult cave rescue group which is affiliated with the National Speleological Society.
6. **All Scout groups are required to have an approved tour permit for trips of all kinds**. Caving activities are included under that plan. National tour permits are required for a trip of 250 miles or more; local permits are issued to cover shorter trips.
7. Both the leader and the individual members of the group must understand these basic practices and policies of caving, which are approved by the Boy Scouts of America and

the National Speleological Society. **In addition to understanding these tenets, every participant in a caving trip must agree, without reservation, to follow all of the specific guidelines contained in the remainder of this statement.**

B. CAVING SAFETY

1. The leader of any cave trip must be fully qualified to handle all problems that may arise and should have had experience as an active participant in a competent cave exploring group. He must realistically evaluate his own knowledge and experience and must never attempt to lead his group into a situation which is beyond his capability or the capability of any member of the group. **The overall capability and pace of a cave exploring group is always that of the least able member of that group**, and no member of the group should ever be encouraged or permitted to attempt a potentially dangerous act that is beyond his ability solely because the remainder of the group has the necessary ability.

The leader must thoroughly comprehend that overwhelming difficulties may easily result from the problems of fatigue, improper or faulty equipment, emotional problems, physical limitations, or excessive eagerness or exuberance in members of the group. Additionally, he must realize that all of these individual problems are often interrelated and that the occurrence of any one of them can easily create a situation that will lead to or accentuate any or all of the others. He must constantly remember that any obstacle overcome on the way into the cave will also have to be overcome on the way out when the group is tired; when the initial enthusiasm of some of the group may have decreased; and when his alertness and physical abilities, as well as these of his group, are at the lowest. He must have adequate first aid training and ability, a comprehensive knowledge of the practices to follow in the event of an accident, and he must keep his group together at all times.

2. **All basic equipment such as clothing, shoes, lights, and spare parts for the lights, hard hats, and food should be appropriate to the cave being explored.** The equipment and spares must never be makeshift or of questionable dependability. The highest standards developed by experienced cave explorers are to be met in all categories of equipment, and the use and repair of each item must be understood and demonstrated by all of the party before entering the cave. Under no conditions should any member of the group be permitted to enter the cave if he does not have all of the required equipment in his possession. The sharing of any equipment, such as lights, between individuals must be prohibited.

Except for groups composed entirely of experienced cavers, the cave to be explored must not require the use of ropes, ladders, or other climbing devices. The safe use of these aids requires extensive initial training and practice under controlled conditions above ground, never in a cave. It is the responsibility of the leader to insure that all equipment is adequate and in good condition.

3. Natural and fabricated hazards such as mud slopes, loose rocks, pits, deep water, complex routes, old ropes, wooden ladders, and the possibility of flooding are all dangers to some degree and must be approached with care and judgment. **If it appears that an accident may still occur in spite of preventive measures, that area must be avoided entirely.**

4. The strength, endurance, and specific abilities of every member of the group must be evaluated in advance and **nothing attempted that exceeds anyone's limitations**. Climbing, crawling, and route finding are not necessarily inborn activities and should be taught and tested before a cave trip is undertaken.

5. Not only the leader, but every person on a cave trip, should be aware of the necessity of constantly observing the whereabouts and potential problems of other members of the group and of providing any assistance necessary. **Running, jumping, horseplay, and solo exploration must be prohibited—such foolhardy actions jeopardize not only the individual but also the entire group.**

6. **Caves are often cold and damp, and hypothermia is a danger**, especially on long trips or trips requiring wading or crawling in water. Try to dress for conditions to be met, stay as dry as possible, and leave the cave immediately if any member of the group shows signs of hypothermia such as uncontrollable shivering, slurred speech, or loss of coordination.

7. **Specific information about the caving trip must be left with a responsible person** back home at time of departure. This should include location and length of time of trip, expected time of return, list of participants, and whom to contact in case of emergency.

8. **A record of every cave trip** will provide valuable assistance to new leaders and cavers alike. Full records of all caving accidents will provide the basis for a guide to the development of a safe caving program. A complete report of any accident, regardless of severity, should be sent to the Safety Committee of the National Speleological Society, Cave Avenue Huntsville, AL 35810. Serious accidents should also be reported to the manager of the Health and Safety Service of the Boy Scouts of America.

C. CAVE CONSERVATION

In spite of the fact that most cave features are made of rock, many of them are, in reality, fragile. Once they are gone or damaged they can never be recovered, nor can they be replaced with anything else. Every cave and its contents requires tens and hundreds of thousands of years to form, and it can all be disfigured or completely destroyed by one moment of carelessness. Carelessness is regrettable and must be guarded against at all times. Deliberate vandalism, on the other hand, is more than regrettable; it is literally a criminal act and must be forbidden. **Every caver has an obligation to do his utmost to protect every cave he visits.**

The necessary degree of protection is relatively easy to obtain, however, if everyone in the group agrees to adhere to the guidelines contained in the policy on the use of wilderness area adopted by the Boy Scouts of America (See note under A 4 on page 1 of this statement). Many of the specific points contained in that wilderness policy are directly applicable to caving and, besides providing protection for the cave and its contents, adherence to these guidelines will result in a safer, more enjoyable, and more easily managed trip. Every caver should adopt an attitude similar to that of an Indian scout passing through the wilderness. He should **leave absolutely no trace of his visit behind when he leaves the cave**. This means that he must leave every natural thing in the cave exactly as it was before he entered; it means removing everything that he brought into the cave; and it means staying on the established trails through a passageway to avoid increasing the number of disfiguring paths. Keep the following points in mind:

1. Cave formations and minerals of any kind must never be removed from the cave for any purpose. Caving trips should never include cave mineral or formation collections. They should rather substitute underground photography or art work for displays and science fair projects. Any delicate, small, or purely colored formations must not even be touched. Both mud and the substances on a person's skin will permanently discolor formations. Some cave formations grow by means of complex chemical processes and, in addition to the discoloration, any deposit left on these formations from the contact can interfere with future growth. Some formations are extremely fragile and will require the caver to exercise great care in order to avoid damaging them. If it is impossible to pass by these formations without causing damage, then the group must ignore any part of the cave beyond that point. Damaging formations to gain access to additional areas of the cave is not an acceptable practice.

2. Bats and all other forms of cave life must never be disturbed nor removed from the cave for any purpose. Many species of cave life are rare and have been brought to the verge of extinction by collectors and vandals. During the winter months, hibernating bats should be left strictly alone. Awakened too often, they will use up their winter's store of fuel and die of starvation before summer. Most bats are extremely beneficial as insect eaters and should never be harmed. Some caves have been designated as special bat habitats and are closed for exploration for all or a part of each year.

3. If the explorer should be fortunate enough to find animal bones or Indian artifacts in a newly explored passage, he should be careful to avoid touching or disturbing them in any way. His best course is to take pictures of them, if possible, and immediately report his findings to competent authorities such as the local natural history museum or the nearest chapter of the National Speleological Society. Many old bones and artifacts that have been lying in caves for extended periods of time will crumble when touched; if they are ever to be removed, it must be by special methods.

4. The explorer must never write, mark, or paint on the walls, ceilings, rocks, or formations of a cave. Some caves have had registers installed by caving groups and visiting cavers are invited to sign them to record their trip. Occasionally it may be necessary to mark a confusing junction so that the correct passage may be found on the

way out of the cave. For this purpose explorers should carry small slips of paper with arrows drawn on them or, a better choice, small strips of reflective tape cut into the shape of an arrow. In either case, the markers are placed in suitable locations as the group enters the cave. They must be collected on the way out. Experienced cavers always follow the rule that arrows placed in a cave, without exception, always point to the exit, never in any other direction.

The use of string to mark passages is not practical. In a small cave the marking of passageways is seldom necessary. A large cave would require a considerable amount of string and it isn't always possible to collect all of it on the way out, resulting in litter.

5. Personal sanitation requirements should be met before entering the cave.

6. Spent carbide should be removed in suitable containers, never dumped in the cave. Once removed from the cave, it should be deposited in roadside trashcans or similar locations, never dumped on the ground. Spent carbide is toxic and will cause sickness and death when eaten by animals. Farm livestock in particular is often harmed this way. An inexpensive plastic bag is ideal for carrying carbide waste safely and easily. Spent carbide still emits a certain amount of acetylene gas and severe burns can result from accidental ignition. Some explorers prefer to use spare bottoms filled with fresh carbide for their carbide lamps, removing and capping the spent one and installing a fresh one as necessary.

7. Each caver should demonstrate his interest in caves and his appreciation for them by **participating in, or organizing, an occasional cave cleanup.** The object is to remove trash and carbide dumps left by thoughtless visitors, and to remove writing on walls through the use of water and stiff-bristled brushes. This makes an excellent group project and teaches the conservation of and the respect for the natural environment of caves.

D. COURTESY TO CAVE OWNERS

All too often cavers forget that **caves belong to the owner of the land above them** and that they must depend upon the goodwill of the owner, who is usually disinterested in their activities. Cavers usually have nothing to offer the cave owner in return for his hospitality and, in fact, quite often represent a problem for him should an accident happen. In recent years caving has increased tremendously. Owners of popular caves are besieged every weekend by cavers seeking entrance, and the result has been that many cave owners are becoming alienated. The owner of the land on which the entrance is located may exclude everyone from the cave if he wishes, and the rudeness and thoughtlessness of some cavers has caused the owners of some popular caves to do just this. The following points are important and should be understood by all cavers:

1. Every group planning to visit a cave must obtain the permission of the owner before entering the land. The best plan is for one or two of the leaders to visit the owner several days before the trip to obtain this permission, or, he may be contacted by letter or telephone. Some owners are reluctant, however, to give permission in writing by

answering a letter so this method may result in disappointment unless the group has had previous contact with the owner. If the group is certain that permission will be granted, it is satisfactory to ask as they arrive for the trip. In this case one or two members of the group should seek out the owner while the rest of the members wait. Do not assume that permission is automatic and begin unloading equipment and changing clothes during the waiting period. Always wait for the owner to give his approval. If you find that the owner cannot be located and you do not have prior permission for this specific trip, then you must go elsewhere.

2. When planning cave trips, do not continually go back to the same well-known caves. **Heavy traffic causes damage to caves and puts a strain on cave owner relations**

(commercial caves excepted).

3. After permission has been obtained, you must usually cross the owner's land to reach the cave. Remember that a farmer's income depends on his crops and livestock. **Don't climb fences that may break under your weight. Always leave gates exactly as you find them, either open or closed.** If the entrance to the cave is covered with boards or brush, make certain that it is replaced, even while the group is in the cave.

4. **Do not tease or chase livestock.** Special care should be taken not to startle flocks of poultry. They sometimes run to one end of their enclosure and some of them may be killed or injured.

5. **Be conscious of any action that will disturb or inconvenience the owner.** Keep noise to a minimum, especially late at night. Pick up all trash, even that left by previous visitors. Don't build a fire, You should never camp on the owner's land unless he extends the invitation. Don't even ask. After you leave, there should be no sign of your visit remaining on the premises.

6. **Ask where it will be convenient to park your cars.** Do not block lanes and driveways.

7. **If it's not late at night, stop on the way out and tell him that you are leaving.** If it is late, leave a note. Remember that the owner's schedule, particularly if he is a farmer, may not be the same as yours. If his home is dark, regardless of the hour, don't disturb him. In either case, thank him at the time of leaving. Sending a follow-up letter including, if possible, pictures taken in the cave, is also a good idea.

8. When obtaining permission to enter the cave, **never underestimate the length of time to be spent in the cave.** If you specify an exit time to the owner, never fail to leave the cave within that time. Longer trips can be planned for the future. Missing an exit time causes unnecessary concern to the owner and, in extreme cases, needless efforts by law enforcement agencies and rescue teams.

These rules boil down to a simple statement: **Use common sense and treat the owner as you would like to be treated.** If caving is to continue in this country, each caver must do all he can to make himself welcome at each cave he visits.

Those seriously interested in caves are invited to affiliate with a local chapter of the National Speleological Society. Information about that organization is available from the National Speleological Society, 2813 Cave Avenue, Huntsville, AL 35810-4431; e-mail nss@caves.org

Educational Content Outline

Caves

- a. How caves are formed**
- b. Cave formations**
 - ? **Fragile**
 - ? **Formed over long periods of time**
- c. Unique Habitat**
 - ? **Specialized life forms**
 - ? **Endangered species**
 - ? **Maternal habitat**
 - ? **Hibernation habitat**

Caving Safety

- a. Proper Clothing**
- b. Helmet**
- c. Light Sources**
- d. Food, water, emergency supplies**
- e. How to move through the Cave**
- f. Group Size**
- g. Emergency preparedness (surface watch)**

Caving Conservation

Courtesy to Cave Owners