



## **A CAVING GUIDE**

# **FOR COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY CLUBS**

### ***What is the purpose of this guide?***

Third level clubs are in the envious position that they can head off on a weekday or weekend to caving regions in the full knowledge that it won't cost much (as its probably well subsidised) and the 'craic' is guaranteed! In recognition of this, the Speleological Union of Ireland have produced this booklet to help third level clubs and their leaders develop the sport to a point where club caving becomes as safe and enjoyable as possible for all its members.

### ***Who are the speleological union of Ireland ?***

The Speleological Union of Ireland (SUI) is the official body representing the interests of speleologists and sporting cavers in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland at local, national and international levels. Having originally been founded in the 1960's, SUI was reconstituted in 1983.

#### **SUI strives to:**

- Actively promote safe caving practice and conservation
- Provide leadership and caving skills courses
- Produce a newsletter about four times a year
- Produce 'Irish Speleology' a publication with a scientific and 'new finds flavour.
- Keep a comprehensive Caving Library in Dublin
- Provide an equipment rental service
- Represent cavers on issues of access
- Organise an annual caving symposium + lots, lots more

At the time of writing, it costs 40E to join as an individual.

Third level students are represented on the SUI committee by a co-opted member.

### ***Who are the Irish cave rescue organisation ?***

The Irish Cave Rescue Organisation (ICRO) is a self help group made up of cavers from all over Ireland. To facilitate a quick reaction in the event of a caving accident, a network of local cave wardens and a call out list is maintained. ICRO manages and stocks cave rescue stores throughout Ireland. ICRO also organises advanced courses on rescue techniques and local cave rescue exercises throughout the year and encourages new cavers to participate.

### ***Club development***

Clubs should recognise the need for continual development of its members, particularly its new members, as those with the experience will not be around forever. Clubs should play an active part in the caving community though attendance of SUI and ICRO courses as well as promoting

good caving practice. Clubs should also promote an awareness of the dangers of caving as well as the adventurous aspects. Experienced members on club trips should assume a degree of responsibility and protect the cave environment.

### ***Trip planning***

Ensure the cave is suitable to the level of experience of the club members.

Obtain accurate weather information - **if in doubt stay out**.

Know the likelihood of flooding and if the cave is flood prone know the location of rescue dumps, escape routes and highest points in the cave.

Leave a call-out: A call-out should be left with someone who is familiar with caving and knows how to initiate it.

Be aware of the type of cave being explored and dress accordingly.

Understand sources of Weils disease and its symptoms.

### ***During the trip***

Due to the nature of third Level Club trips, it is likely that there will often be a number of beginners on each excursion. It is the duty of **each** experienced caver is to ensure the safety of beginners as well as to provide an enjoyable trip.

Ensure proper equipment and clothing are used, always insist on using gloves and a proper caving light. Always carry spare batteries and an alternative light source. Personal emergency equipment such as survival bags, basic First Aid kits and food should be carried into the cave. Leave a Comfort Sack with more extensive emergency provisions at the entrance or just inside the entrance to the cave.

Where vertical features are tackled in a caving trip the competence of any person life lining or rigging pitches should not be in doubt. It is their responsibility to deal with any problems that may arise mid-pitch.

After your trip do not forget to cancel your call-out.

### ***Equipment***

The aim of any club with regard to its equipment store should be to obtain the best equipment available. Third level clubs generally have access to funds on a yearly basis that private clubs could not possibly obtain. This money should be put to good use by purchasing good quality caving equipment for its members and allow for the immediate replacement of any equipment showing excessive wear or damage. Experience has taught most clubs that helmets, lights, belts, followed by over suits and wellies are the best order in which to acquire gear. Rigging gear is very dependent on what's being tackled and is generally a later development.

### ***Training***

It is the nature of caving clubs that experience be passed on from member to member. While this is an essential part of ensuring continuity in the club it can prove fatal to beginners where bad habits or short cuts are passed on from experienced members. Caving and safety should be synonymous.

Training courses are available from the SUI, which deal with all aspects of caving from a basic introduction to caving to advanced SRT and rigging. Your club secretary should have all

the details. If not, you can find out most of the information you need on the SUI web-site [www.caving.ie](http://www.caving.ie)

First aid courses should be run at least once a year by the club. Courses are available that deal specifically with caving and thus are far more appropriate than other first aid courses on offer. Contact the SUI Training Officer for further details.

## ***Access***

In general, to gain access to a cave, private land has to be crossed. The cave entrance and the cave passage are the property of private individuals. For well-known or regularly visited caves, access is generally not a problem, however in many cases access arrangements have been made either formally or informally with the SUI. It is the responsibility of visiting cavers to know the access conditions of a particular cave, as any cave site approached without prior permission could result in access being denied to the visiting party and subsequently to any local cavers. The caves of Fermanagh are particularly important in this regard. Contact the SUI Conservation and Access officer if you need some help with this or again you can find access information on [www.caving.ie](http://www.caving.ie)

## ***Conservation***

Caves are a very unique part of our environment. Their development, untouched over thousands of years has resulted in incredible passage shapes, spectacular calcite formations and a home for various unique creatures. Even exercising extreme caution every caving trip deteriorates a cave to a certain extent. Unfortunately this deterioration has resulted in the requirement of areas of certain caves to be taped off. The destruction of such a delicate environment whether deliberate or not is a crime against nature. It is therefore the responsibility of every caver to protect this environment to ensure its preservation for others to admire.

The following basic rules should apply to all caving trips.

- Never touch the formations.
- Always wear gloves.
- Never leave way markers, cairns or score arrows into the walls to mark the route. Instead carry a survey and detailed description of the cave with you.
- Avoid the use of carbide. The duration of trips in Irish caves does not warrant its use.
- Never dump rubbish of any sort in or near a cave.
- Report any illegal dumping in a cave entrance to the relevant local authority.

## ***Safety***

A comfort Sac should be standard for all caving trips.

What kind of bag is most suitable?

The comfort sac should be a bag that is suitable to take under ground. The ideal type of bag is a large tackle bag. If the bag is too large it will be very difficult to take underground in the event of an emergency. It may be necessary to put the contents into two bags. The sleeping bag and clothing should be vacuum packed to keep them dry. If there are any smaller bags, within the main bag, the contents list should be attached to each, so that every bag or container will not be opened unnecessarily. The contents list should contain the "best before" date of the food.

Where is the best location?

The best location for a comfort sac is at the site of an accident. But nobody knows where an accident is going to happen. The most suitable place for the comfort sac to be left is just inside the entrance of the cave or at the bottom of a pitch. This may also be a good indication for the ICRO warden if he is at the correct cave, as there may be a number of caves in the area. If the comfort sac is left in the group's transport, everybody in the group must know where the keys are left so that it can be got as fast as possible.

Who needs one ?

Every caving group should bring a comfort sack of some description. The contents will depend on the nature of the cave, the size and type of the group and the remoteness of the cave. All novice groups should have a quite comprehensive comfort sac and it is common for student groups to have more than one in their caving gear store. All should be regularly updated and checked.

### **COMFORT SAC CONTENTS**

- Sleeping bag
- Karrimat
- Double Bivi bag
- Bivi bag
- Lizard bag
- Bothy Tent ("KISU")
- Clothing
- First aid kit (comprehensive)
- Contents list
- Stove / fuel / matches
- Cups + 2 Plates + 2 Spoons
- Water
- Pencils and waterproof paper
- Lights (candles )
- Puzzle book
- Food
- Callout list (an up to date copy)

### ***Cave exploration and caving expeditions***

To be the first to enter a cave passage is an experience few have been privileged with. It carries with it a duty to preserve the find in its original state, to fully survey and publish the new discovery.

Third level clubs are in the enviable position of having at their disposal a group of cavers who are generally in regular contact and have few commitments to restrain them from partaking in caving expeditions and cave exploration. The spirit of participating in caving expeditions abroad should be encouraged at third level as this leads to both an increase in the standard of caving within the clubs as well as an increase in participation in the sport after leaving third level. The SUI provides expedition funding through a grant scheme each year. Contact the Expedition officer. More information is also available on the web site at <http://www.cavingireland.org/SUI/Expedition.htm>

SUI Address:

C/O The Burren Outdoor education Centre, Bell Harbour, Co. Clare

[www.caving.ie](http://www.caving.ie)

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