



Spelunking/Caving

Activity Permitted for: J C S A

Not Recommended for: D B

Council Approval: Required as per Council Policy P1;
[Activity/Trip Permission \(2129\)](#)

Vendor Approval: Required for outfitter (vendor)

Required Training: 281 GS 201 Trips & Overnights (gsLearn)

A guide with documented experience in cave exploration must accompany the group into the cave. The caving site and itinerary of spelunking/caving activities such as when caving will begin, time of return, and whether Girl Scouts will be lowered into caves from an elevated position must be submitted with 2129 Activity/Trip Permission.

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, and expert guides.

Learn More

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

Include Girl Scout Members with Disabilities

Talk to Girl Scout members with disabilities and their caregivers. Ask about needs and accommodations. Always be sure to contact public, governmental, and tourist cave locations in advance to ensure they are able to accommodate those 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 and have access to whatever is needed to fully participate, such as proper equipment, prior experiences, and the skills needed to enjoy the activity.

Infectious Disease Guidelines. Girl Scouts use a commonsense approach to health and safety. Before participating in Girl Scouting activities, members are to undergo health checks at home for any symptoms such as fever of 100.4 (or need for fever-reducing medications) chills, cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, stomach aches, nausea, or vomiting. Members with any of these symptoms or in need of fever-reducing medication **MUST** stay home until fully recovered.

Emergency Action Plan (EAP). Review and document your Emergency Action Plan (EAP) before taking girls out for any activity and review it with the girls so they too are prepared. Think through scenarios of what can go wrong such as an accident, physical injury to a girl, missing girl, sudden illness, or sudden weather or water emergencies.

Spelunking / Caving Checkpoints

Vendor Approval Required for spelunking/caving outfitters. Review Vendor Approval section under the *Standard Safety Guidelines for vendor approval timelines*. Connect with your Girl Scout council for approved vendor suggestions to ensure they are properly insured. If it is not, allow enough time to have the vendor approved. The owner operator should be able to confirm one million dollars General Liability insurance upon request. For privately/locally owned outfitters (vendors), the council will request a certificate of insurance to document evidence of the insurance coverage and name the council as additional insured. Most facilities will accommodate this request if they are able to administratively. [See High Adventure Approved Vendors List \(#2127\)](#).

Required Training: Troop/Group Program leaders must complete GSUSA's online leadership courses and GSVSC's 281 GS 201 Trips & Overnights course in gsLearn. Adult volunteer chaperones must complete GSVSC's 281 GS 104 Orientation for Support Volunteers online course in gsLearn.

Verify instructor knowledge and experience. A guide with documented experience in cave exploration must 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.

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).

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. **The council is to be notified of caving site and itinerary of spelunking/caving activities such as when caving will begin, time of return, and whether Girl Scouts will be lowered into caves from an elevated position.**

Compile key contacts. See [Introduction: Standard Safety Guidelines](#) 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 for 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 certification.

Get a weather report. Check Weather.com the day of the event. 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).