

Starting Vertical Caving



When getting into vertical caving, the importance of mentorship and gaining experience under the supervision of other vertically competent cavers cannot be understated, however each individual is ultimately responsible for their own safety and learning process. It is a big responsibility and potential liability to teach someone vertical in caves. To make getting on rope more accessible for new cavers and reduce the burden on those vertically competent cavers willing to mentor, here are some resources to guide people on the right path to start their vertical caving journey.

Do Your Own Research

This is a list of HIGHLY recommended reading. Especially the basic vertical techniques book that recently came out. Reading this book before getting on rope is going to put you miles ahead of everyone else. You don't know what you don't know. I personally am going to start requiring anyone who approaches me about vertical to have read this book first so I know that have a good foundation

Vertical Section- Basic Vertical Techniques- 1st Edition

Other resources:

Derek Bristol's Videos through NSS website

America Caving Accidents

On Rope

Alpine Caving Techniques- J Kennedy

Vertical training classes put on through organizations such as NSS, HCRU, Caving Academy, NCRC, the Gauntlet, etc.

Buy Your Own Gear

A big barrier for people getting into vertical is buying their own gear. It is expensive, so many people do not have spare kits to loan to new vertical cavers. The grotto is working on buying a practice kit, but it will be reserved for above ground practice and instruction only. The above recommended reading outlines different types of setups and what is necessary. It is important to consider where you buy from in the case of life supporting gear. This either means directly from the manufacturer or from a reputable vendor that specializes in selling caving or climbing gear. There are several regionally owned businesses that are extremely helpful in getting you outfitted. Here is a non comprehensive list:

- On Rope One- Union Grove, AL
- Inner Mountain Outfitters- Chattanooga, TN
- Toxic Frog- Mooresville, IN
- HowNot2- online
- Final Frontier Sports

*Note: It is NOT safe to buy life supporting gear off of Amazon. There have been instances of companies creating counterfeit items. These items are not guaranteed to be made with the same quality as one made from the manufacturer and have not been through the same safety testing processes and therefore should not be used in instances where gear failure could result in injury or death.

Find a Mentor

Next step is to find a mentor or someone willing to help you get on rope. They should show you how to apply the knowledge you have gained in your own research. They may take you on your first vertical trip, they may not. They may teach you more advanced skills, they may not. Do note that just because someone does vertical caving, does not automatically mean they are necessarily doing it with best practices in mind or even safely. It is very important to use your own research and critical thinking skills to identify whether someone is a good person to learn from.

Have Other People Check You

In general, the more people who watch you on rope and verify your competency, the more confident in your safety you can be. After doing research and learning the basics of vertical from someone, the Nashville Grotto HIGHLY encourages you to do a skills check off on two different occasions with two different "verified" people before going on a vertical trip with the grotto. This is a way for you to feel good about your abilities as well as for trip leaders to verify your skills before inviting you on their trip. I personally will be requiring this from those new to vertical going on my trip. New cavers are responsible for contacting officers and setting up times to perform check offs.

