

# Considerations When Leading a Grotto Trip



## Describing the trip

Determining Difficulty- Rating difficulty is up to the discretion of the trip leader, but it is always good to describe the features of the cave that may make it challenging so people can make decisions for themselves

**Beginner:** Always horizontal. Should have relatively low technical ability required to move through the cave in regards to skills such as climbing, stemming, squeezing, etc. Relatively low consequence cave in regards to danger from things such as cold water, height exposure, or loose rock. Very limited features such as tight spaces, prolonged crawling, or swimming that would require someone to have a good “head game”. A beginner rated cave trip should be something approachable to the average person with minimal to no caving experience but an adventurous mindset and a decent fitness level.

**Moderate:** Could either be a horizontal or straightforward vertical trip. Ultimately up to the leader's discretion. May have more technical moves such as stemming or climbing and be generally more physically demanding. It may have more factors to consider such as exposure, crawling, cold water, tight squeezes, or duration. A moderate horizontal trip is one that may feel more intense than a beginner trip mentally and/or physically due to any of these factors. A moderate vertical trip requires basic vertical competency but is relatively straightforward such as a small pit in a cave or a pit bounce trip. It does not require more advanced skills such as managing changing rope weight like you would on a big rappel, rebelay, redirects, etc.

**Advanced:** Usually a vertical trip with additional components such as rebelay, water, exposure, long duration, etc. Could possibly be a horizontal trip. Should be targeted towards those with significant caving experience.

Gear Requirements: May be good to have extra items such as gloves and knee pads as the leader. The grotto has 6 helmets and headlamps available to loan out for trips. Please give at least a week's notice for all gear requests.

Recommend participants bring at least the following items: helmet, extra lights, knee pads, gloves, lugged sole boots, synthetic clothing that can get muddy. Remind everyone to pack extra layers, water, snacks. Everyone should have their own vertical kit if necessary. If there is a chance participants may need a wetsuit, it can be up to the leader's discretion to require one or give the participants clear information so that they can make their own decision.

Vertical skills check: It is totally acceptable to ask someone going on a trip about prior vertical experience and ask them to demonstrate a changeover at a minimum as well as any additional skills they may need to do on the trip. Make sure you have an understanding of how different set ups work (frog, ropewalker). It is also acceptable to inspect someone's gear safety issues such as correctly attached life supporting points, signs of wear, etc.

Selecting a cave- If you want to lead a trip but are unsure of where to go, feel free to reach out to other grotto members to get ideas. Many keep lists of beginner friendly cave with good landowner access. It also may be worth your while to do a recon trip to a cave with trip leading in mind.

Post on website- Create an event on the grotto website. Include basic information such as what cave, meet up place and time, and features and objectives of the trip, equipment needed, and difficulty level with additional information. It is also important to include information about parking, the approach, and approximate duration of the trip. Something else important to consider is number of people on the trip. Permits, such as SCCi, may have a maximum party size. Other factors that may go into determining trip size is difficulty and duration. Generally, the bigger the party, the longer the trip will be, particularly if there are vertical or other difficult features of the cave. Other factors to consider are parking, delicate features in the cave, and landowner relationships. If you have permission to visit a cave from a landowner, be considerate of trip size and how many people are coming onto the property.

## Preparing for the trip

- Send out a reminder email 1-2 weeks before with clarification or changes to details
- Permits will need to be pulled before posting trip if relevant
- Have a map and make sure you know the cave well enough. Its ok if you don't know it like the back of your hand. Additionally, find out who else is familiar with the cave and may be going on the trip
- Talk with someone else who knows the cave well if necessary
- Consider meet up time vs driving distance. Budget in time for people to be late
- Provide phone number for last minute cancellations- they WILL happen

## Responsibilities during the trip

- Set the call out. Make sure everyone is aware of who and when it is
- Maintain a headcount during trip
- If a bigger group, designate someone who is a strong caver to bring up the rear
- Provide copies of maps if appropriate
- Stop often to verify where in the cave you are. Make sure to keep other party members oriented to location as well.
- You set the pace for the trip. If you are in the front and you stop to wait for others to catch up, don't start moving right away- you've just had a nice rest, but the people in the back have not.
- Keep an eye on everyone's morale/energy levels. Be prepared to call to turn around if someone is not doing well
- Enforce Leave No Trace principles
- Be prepared to rig everything if there is vertical or designate someone else ahead of time. Be sure to either personally check everyone when getting on/off rope make sure buddy checks are being done

## Write a Trip Report

After the trip, write a trip report and post to the grotto website and/or submit for publication in Speleonews. Trip reports can be written narrative style or can be filled in from a template such as the one below. There is no one size fits all. Many examples can be found on the grotto website.

### Trip Report Template:

Cave Name/ Trip Location:

County and State:

Date:

Participants:

Time Meeting Up:

Weather:

Time in Cave:

What was the objective of the trip? Was it accomplished?

Where did you go in the cave?

What are three interesting things that you experienced on the trip?

Time out:

Equipment Used:

What happened next:

Would you repeat this trip? Why or why not?:

What advice would you give someone interested in going to this location?

*\*Disclaimer: This document is not intended to be a comprehensive guide to how to lead a trip, it is merely a list of considerations put together by experienced trip leaders in order to make the process of leading a trip more accessible to other members. All prospective trip leaders are responsible for doing their due diligence before leading a trip*

