

Proficient Cavers Information Book

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INTRODUCTION

1. Candidates who successfully complete the Joint Service Caving Proficiency (CVP) course are encouraged to gain further caving experience and return to the Joint Service Mountain Training Wing (Ripon) for further caving courses. This caving experience can be gained either under the guidance of a suitably qualified cave leader/instructor or as a member of a group of CVP holders. However, a group of CVP cavers are restricted to non-vertical caves of no greater difficulty than grade 2. (Equivalent=Diff Cave”) and a minimum group size of 4.
2. The aim of this booklet to provide useful information for CVP qualified cavers who intend to cave as a group with other CVP holders, without the leadership of a qualified Joint Service, Local Cave Leader, Cave Leader or Instructor. The rules for caving within the Services are detailed in the Joint Service Caving Handbook, JSP432. The information contained in this booklet is an extract from the JSP432 (issue 02) and any questions about the contents of this booklet should be directed to the CSCA's Technical Training adviser.
3. Joining a civilian caving club or the Combined Services Caving Association (CSCA) will enable you to further your caving experience in a controlled environment. The CSCA can provide equipment, leadership and training and welcomes non-members at its regular UK meets.
4. The CSCA is the representative body for all service cavers and is responsible for giving advice to the MoD, MoD units and individuals on all matters concerning caving, potholing and gorge descending. Additional information about the CSCA is contained in Annex A.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

5. Caves are a limited resource. Since the 1970's their use by many groups has grown enormously, to the extent that the very caves they wish to explore are becoming endangered. Furthermore the landowners, on whose land cave entrances are found, have seen a rapid growth in the numbers of people crossing their land. This in itself has brought many associated access problems. Indeed landowners and farmers have threatened to ban all access on many occasions. In 1990 a farmer in Derbyshire threatened to seal permanently, with concrete, the cave entrances on his land. This was an extreme case which was brought to confrontation by insensitive and irresponsible cavers, who showed little respect for the farmer's wishes.
6. Most caves have specific access requirements, ranging from asking the landowner, through to the need to obtain a local leader. The reasons for these restrictions vary. The landowner may require them, quite apart from any need to control access for conservation purposes, or they may be for conservation reasons alone. There is always considerable debate regarding this subject, but it must be assumed that invariably where there is some form of access control, there is good reason for it. Failure to comply with these requirements can lead to a loss of access for everyone or to the destruction of some valuable feature. Details of access requirements can be found in the local guidebooks and the handbooks of the Regional Caving Councils. In addition the CSCA or the Joint Service Mountain Training Wing (Ripon) can provide advice.

PREPARATION

7. One member of the caving party is to be nominated as leader. This will normally be the most experienced or the person with prior knowledge of the cave. Before going underground he/she is to ensure that:

- a. The selected cave or part of the cave is within the capabilities of all the party. Where the group consists of CVP holders the cave must not contain any ladder pitches and be of no greater difficulty than Grade II (Equivalent=Diff Cave”).
- b. The weather, water levels and local conditions as forecast are suitable for the duration of the trip.
- c. Minimum group size is 4, maximum size is 8. (If caving without a qualified leader all must be CVP qualified).
- d. No one is included in the party against his or her will.
- e. Individual clothing and equipment is adequate and serviceable, and appropriate survival and safety equipment is carried (see para 9 & 10).
- f. Access permission has been obtained in accordance with local procedures (including the payment of any courtesy fees).
- g. A message is left with a responsible person or duty staff, containing the following information:
 - (1) Names of leader and party members.
 - (2) Address and telephone number (permanent unit or exercise location as appropriate).
 - (3) Cave name and route to be followed.
 - (4) Time in and estimated time out.
 - (5) Action to be taken if overdue (see para 23).
- h. All members of the party are aware of and familiar with accident and emergency procedures and how to call out a rescue team should one be needed.
- i. It should be borne in mind that on the return trip, considerably more energy is needed than going into the cave. Consequently plans made must take the return journey into consideration.
- j. Consideration should also be given to the fact that a cave entrance may be some miles from any road or transport. The leader should therefore take into account the journey from the exit to safety. The weather can change dramatically, whilst the party is underground, and the party could well emerge into snow and white out conditions. How would a group of cold, wet cavers with miles to walk to their vehicle or accommodation cope? Should they become lost or disorientated, a most serious situation could develop. The necessary precautions must therefore be taken.
- k. The group should be aware of any changes to current regulations concerning caving and a deputy leader is nominated.

ACCIDENT AND EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

13. Accidents may be due to natural events, but very often they are caused by inexperience or foolhardiness. Historically, the biggest single cause of accidents has been falling and frequently these falls occur climbing ladders without a lifeline, or with inadequate life lining. However, practically all of them are caused by the wrong selection of equipment, inexperience or bad technique - all mistakes which the JSAT scheme is designed to avoid. Currently water and its associated hazards continue to represent a very real hazard to cavers.

14. In the event of an accident, a well-understood procedure is essential for the safety of all members of the party. The group should:

- a. Stop.
- b. Ensure that both he/she and the remainder of the party are safe.
- c. Get to the casualty by a safe route.
- d. Secure the casualty from further injuries.
- e. Assess the situation and decide on a course of action.

15. **Possible Courses of Action.** In the event of an accident there are 2 possible courses of action:

- a. If the injury is only minor, evacuate the casualty yourself.
- b. Implement a cave rescue call-out.

16. **Self Rescue.** Before a self rescue is decided upon, leaders must consider the following:

- a. Is rescue possible without doing more damage to the casualty
- b. Are the injuries so minor, that the casualty can be moved without expert assistance?
- c. Is the party capable of performing the rescue (In terms of fitness and proficiency)?
- d. Does the party have the necessary equipment?
- e. What would be the effect on the casualty of remaining static (cold and hypothermia) and would this outweigh further damage to minor injuries in the event of moving out of the cave?

17. Unless the answer to all the above questions is YES, a cave rescue "Call-Out" must be implemented. Details of simple rescue techniques are detailed in the CSCA technical publication No 3 "Technical Skill for Proficient Cavers".

18. **Call-Out Procedure.** The two most suitably experienced and fittest members of the party should be sent out. At least one must be familiar with the cave system. Whilst awaiting rescue, the remainder of the party should keep active by preparing for the rescue team and continuing to administer first aid to the casualty.

19. In the event of an accident underground in the UK, the first contact should be with the Police, either by dialing 999, or the local police number. The Police will then inform the cave rescue warden or duty controller, who will call you back.

NOTE: If using a mobile phone the appropriate Police station must be contacted directly. Dialing 999 may result in the call being diverted to the different police area who will then contact the wrong cave rescue organisation. Local police numbers are detailed in Annex B.

20. The cave rescue controller will require the following information:

- a.. Name of party.
- b. Caving area.
- c. Cave name and area of system.
- d. What has happened (type and extent of injury if known).
- e. Name, age and address of injured person (if known).
- f. Time of accident.
- g. Details of rest of party.
- h. Equipment carried.
- i. Time of entry into cave system.
- j. Emergency rations carried and how long they will last.
- k. Physical and mental condition of the remainder of the party.

21. **The Casualty.** Someone in the party must stay with the casualty at all times and comfort him/her. Shock and exposure are more likely to be fatal than further physical damage caused by moving the casualty. First Aid should be given, as well as treatment for shock. If in water, he must be moved out of it and be kept away from draughts that may chill him.

22. **Hypothermia.** Collectively, cold and wet can be fatal. A person suffering from them can exhibit all or some of the symptoms of hypothermia, in particular they slow down and wish to sleep. Food, rest and warmth are needed. Put the casualty inside a survival bag, try to insulate him/her from the cave floor and persuade him/her to eat, if the injury allows. No matter what happens, the casualty must never be left alone. The whole success of any cave rescue depends, in many ways, on the people with the casualty, carrying out the correct procedure.