Minimum-Impact Code of Ethics for Caving Groups
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The goal of this code of ethics is to encourage practices that minimize negative impacts to caves. As we learn more about cave environments, we evaluate and redefine caving conduct. These guidelines, compiled from the experiences and contributions of many cavers, describe low-impact caving techniques.

Avoid harming cave resources—aesthetic, cultural, paleontological, geological, hydrological, mineralogical, meteorological, biological, as well as microbial. Move gently and be good stewards. Think safety — take care of yourself and your team. Take care of the caves.

- Each caver should wear a helmet with a light attached. Each caver should carry water, food, a bottle for urine, and three sources of light with extra batteries and bulbs.
- All cave packs, vertical gear, boots, gloves, helmets, and lint-free clothing should be freshly washed to avoid transfer of mud, dust, and microbes from other cave environments.
- Use footwear with nonmarring/nonmarking soles. Whether light or dark colored, many soles do leave marks on calcite—test soles on untreated limestone or concrete. No heavy waffle stompers. Traditional black lugged soles will leave marks on cave surfaces. Be careful with blond rubber soles—chunks from soft soles tend to break off, leaving debris in cave passages.
- Use soft or padded cave packs. Avoid hard-edged boxes. Choose gear that is smaller, lighter, and more compact.

- Don't disturb bats or other cave-dwelling creatures. Watch for insects and avoid crushing them underfoot.
- Don't smoke or use tobacco in caves. Smoke and fumes can kill bats, invertebrates, and other cave-dwelling animals.

- Wear gloves. Check gloves for mud, dirt, and holes.
- Know which areas require clean clothes, shoes, and gear. Don't enter pristine areas with muddy or dusty garments and gear.
- Avoid isolated pools.
- Limit scratching of skin and hair. Tens of thousands of skin fragments and debris fall from each human body every hour. Never comb or brush hair in a cave. Reduce the input of organic carbons.

- Leave nothing in caves. Carry out trash. Do not mark on cave surfaces. Never mar a cave with graffiti.
- Remove all solid and liquid wastes. Carry an emergency pee bottle and burrito kit. Carry out all urine, feces, spit, vomit, and other waste.
- Avoid dropping crumbs and food particles. Eat over a plastic bag. Carry out crumbs and debris. Don't eat on the move.
- If you light a candle, catch the wax drips on a suitable base such as heavy foil.
- If carbide lamps are allowed, carry the spent carbide out of the cave in plastic bottles with threaded lids.

- Stay on established trails. Sit inside the trails. Keep packs and other items within the path. Choose the most impacted pathways.
- Move carefully and gently through the entire cave—avoid kicking up dust.
- Always spot each other in fragile areas. Especially watch heads, backs, hands, feet, and packs.
- Spot each other on climbs. Remember to maintain three points of contact.
- Touch as little as possible. Avoid leaning on walls, ceilings, or speleothems. Don't sit on formations. Look and avoid trampling floor deposits. When movement requires handholds, look first to avoid delicate features and use knuckles or fingertips for balance rather than dirty open palms.
- During survey and exploration, establish pathways on durable surfaces to minimize future impacts.

- Take nothing from caves. Removal of natural or historical objects is unethical and illegal unless you have a collection permit for authorized research. Check with cave managers, archaeologists, biologists, and historians before making decisions about large items or cultural materials. (Recently-deposited trash usually should be removed. Always carry extra plastic bags and use common sense safety precautions.)

- Point out unsafe or damaging behavior. It is every caver's responsibility to ensure that cave environments remain as pristine as possible and that every team member is safe and aware of conservation ethics. Cave softly … and leave no trace.