

Safety Activity Checkpoint Spelunking/Caving

HIGH-ADVENTURE ACTIVITY: Trip or High-Adventure Approval Form Required
First-Aider Required

Council Approval:
Required

Activity Permitted For:
J C S A

Not Allowed For:
Daisies and Brownies

***No Approved Vendor
Required**



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 is similar to rock climbing and often involves using ropes to crawl and climb through cavern nooks and crannies. *These checkpoints do not apply to groups taking trips to tourist or commercial caves, which often include safety features such as paths, electric lights, and stairways. **Caving is not permitted for Daisies and Brownies.**

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).

Learn More:

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

Making Activities Accessible

In order to make your activity accessible to girls of all abilities, it's important to communicate with all girl attendees and their caregivers to learn about and accommodate their varied support needs. For resources and information on accessible sport and adventure activities, visit [Move United](#).

Equity

In addition to physical and social-emotional disabilities, consider the history, culture, and past experiences of the girls in your troop that could affect a girl's ability to equally participate in an activity. Work with girls and families to understand how an activity is perceived. Ensure that all girls and their families feel comfortable that they have access to whatever is needed to fully participate, such as the proper equipment, prior experiences, and skills needed to enjoy the activity.

Safety Activity Checkpoints

[Emergency Action Plan \(EAP\)](#). Review and document your Emergency Action Plan (EAP) ahead of time before taking girls out for this activity. Think through scenarios of what can go wrong, such as, an accident, physical injury to a girl, missing girl, or sudden illness.

[Standard Safety Guidelines](#). Refer to the "Standard Safety Guidelines" in the [Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints](#) which apply to all Girl Scout gatherings and activities. When the adult-to-girl ratio, or other safety parameters, are stricter for a specific activity than in the Standard Safety Guidelines, always follow the stricter parameters in the activity chapter.

[COVID-19 Guidelines](#). Review the "Coronavirus Safety in Girl Scouts" section in the [Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints](#) under the "Standard Safety Guidelines" section and be certain to consult with [GSNorCal's specific COVID-19 guidance](#). When applicable, always call ahead to the vendor, property or facility involved to check for their COVID-19 safety requirements as you prepare to take girls for this activity.

Verify instructor knowledge and experience. A guide with documented experience in cave exploration should accompany the group into the cave. A guide can also help decide which caves are suitable. An adult with documented experience should give pre-trip instructions.

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. GSNorCal does not require the use of an approved vendor for this activity.

Compile key contacts. See [Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints 2023-2024](#) 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 affect 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 to handle 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. See [Volunteer Essentials](#) for information about first-aid standards and training.

Get a weather report. See [Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints 2023-2024](#). 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)
- Closed toed shoes

Girl Scouts of Northern California’s Approval Process for Caving/Spelunking

Caving/Spelunking is considered a high-adventure activity and must be pre-approved by the council.

- **Trip or High-Adventure Approval Form:** Submit the online [Trip or High-Adventure Approval Form](#) to council at least 4-6 weeks prior to your activity. Gather the following information to complete this form:
 - Confirmation that your chaperones are registered members of Girl Scouts of Northern California, have a current background check, completed the troop chaperone course and troop driver course (if transporting girls), and completed the [California State Mandated Reporter Training](#). Troop Leaders can find this information in their [Volunteer Toolkit](#).
 - Name of First Aider and a copy of their current CPR/First Aid certification card. Certification needs to be renewed every two years. If you are hiking or backpacking farther than 30 minutes from a medical facility, please have the information of the member, who is certified in Wilderness First Aid, accompanying your troop.
 - Confirm that the necessary online and in-person courses have been completed for this trip. You can find more information or register for these courses in your [MyGS Account - GSLearn](#) in the section called Trip & Outdoor Advisor.
 - The **Trip & Outdoor Advisor Course** is required for all overnight and [high-adventure activities](#).
 - The **Camp Out course** is required for all camping trips that involve advanced outdoor cooking or camping trip with girls to a campground or other non-GSNorCal outdoor facility for longer than 1 night without indoor plumbing and electricity. Girls should have already had practice sleeping and cooking outdoors.
 - The **Extended Trips course** is required for troops traveling three (3) nights or more.
 - The **Girl Scout Small Craft Safety Training** is required before you take girls on a small craft water adventure.