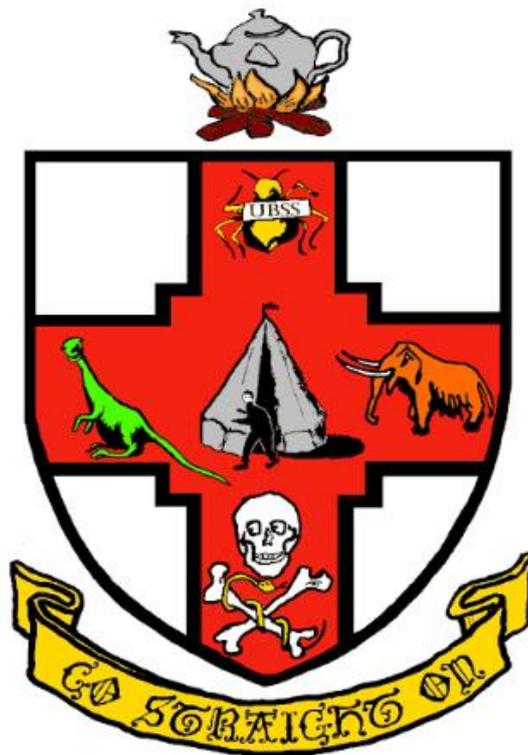


# The University of Bristol Spelæological Society



## *Fresher Handbook* **2024**

Caving is one of the most exciting sports around. There are caving trips to suit everyone; caves can be dry, underground rivers or lakes, leisurely wanders or have plenty of challenging squeezes and climbs.

This handbook contains useful information to get you started on caving. However, don't worry if it doesn't all make sense. Just come along and join us for a social on Tuesday nights to get yourself on a trip or to find out more. If you can't make it to the social, where most trips are arranged, then you can still sign up for club trips by messaging in the WhatsApp group chat or by messaging us on our Instagram and Facebook.

<b><i>Details of the Fresher's Weekend</i></b> .....	4
<b><i>What to Bring</i></b> .....	5
<b><i>Costs and Other Notes</i></b> .....	6
<b><i>Menstruating Underground</i></b> .....	7
<b><i>Women &amp; Gender Diverse Caving</i></b> .....	8
<b><i>UBSS Activities</i></b> .....	8
<b><i>UBSS Facilities</i></b> .....	9
<b><i>Caving Equipment and Where To Buy It</i></b> .....	11
<b><i>A Brief UBSS History</i></b> .....	13
<b><i>Books, Magazines and Online Resources</i></b> .....	14
<b><i>Caving Areas in Great Britain</i></b> .....	15
<b><i>What is a Call Out?</i></b> .....	18

# Autumn Calendar

**Chilli Night** - Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> September

7pm at 21 Woodland Road

Join us for our traditional welcome night with FREE Chilli and Drinks! There will be a short talk followed by food and some typical caving games.



**Cowstails Pub Crawl**

Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> September

Details TBC

Familiarise yourself with the watering holes of Bristol with UBSS.

**Mendip Fresher Weekend**

5<sup>th</sup>- 6<sup>th</sup> October

Give It A Go!

Details TBC

Your first opportunity to come caving with UBSS. More details on weekends in a later section...

**South Wales Fresher Weekend**

October

Details TBC

Another chance to come caving. This time in South Wales with the huge horizontal systems they have there.

**Bonfire Weekend** - 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> November

Details TBC

An UBSS staple weekend. Expect a barrel of beer, fireworks and perhaps a spit roast lamb. (Oh and of course, a bonfire!)

**CHECC** (Council of Higher Education

Caving Clubs) - 22<sup>nd</sup>-24<sup>th</sup> November

South Wales

CHECC this year is being held in South Wales! CHECC is the event when all University caving clubs get together and have a big party (sometimes we even go caving too!).

**REMEMBER:** Evening trips are organized informally in the pub or by messaging on the WhatsApp Group Chat on a frequent basis. If you want to do some more caving, just ask!

## **Details of the Fresher's Weekend**

These weekends are an excellent introduction to caving, and a great way to meet fellow members of the club. Don't fret if you can't come along as there will be many other opportunities for you to cave and socialise throughout the autumn term.

For the Mendip Trip:

Meet early on Saturday morning at the Richmond Building where we will sort out caving kit. From here we will travel to the Mendip Hills and enjoy a weekend at our very own hut in the woods. Saturday will consist of an introduction to caving. Dinner on Saturday and breakfast on Sunday will be provided. On Sunday after more caving, we will return to Bristol.

For the South Wales Trip:

Meet after lectures on Friday evening at the Richmond Building (eat beforehand) where we will sort out caving kit. From here we will drive over the bridge to Wales into the Brecon Beacons where we will stay at another club's hut. Breakfast will be provided on Saturday and Sunday, and dinner will be provided on Saturday. There will be caving trips on Saturday and Sunday, and we will return to Bristol in the evening of Sunday.

### **IMPORTANT**

**To attend these weekends, you must be a member of UBSS through the SU website - it is only £10 for the whole year which includes the BCA (British Caving Association) Membership you need so we can take you caving.**

# What to Bring

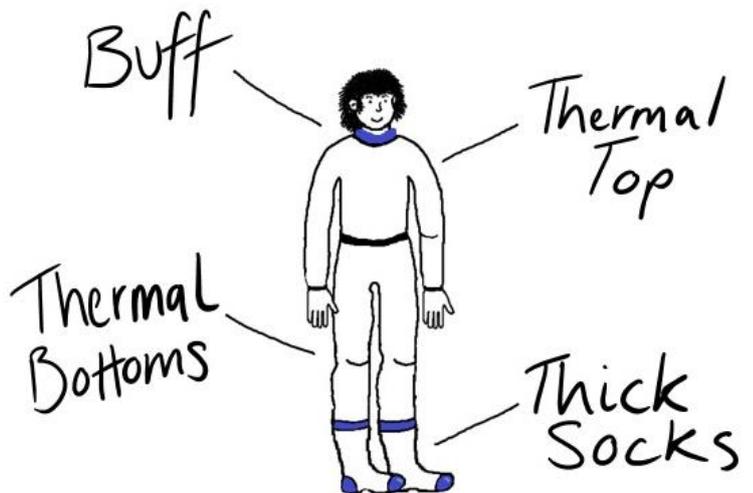
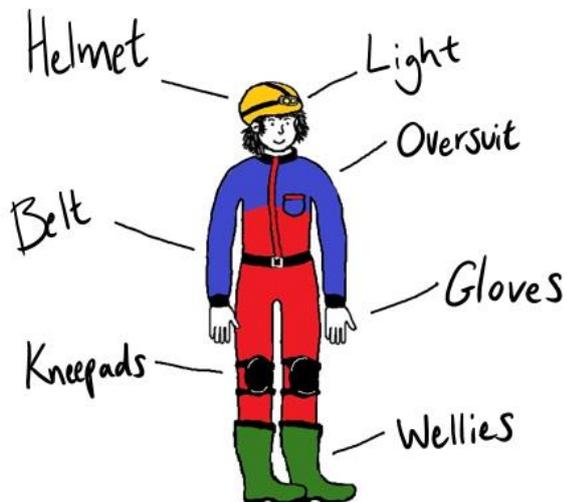
What Cavers wear:

## On Top

Headtorch, Helmet, Oversuit, Belt, Gloves, Kneepads, Wellies

## Underneath

Thermals, Undersuit (Furrysuit), Thick socks or Neoprene Wetsuit Socks, Buff



Oversuits, Helmets, belts and lights will be provided but you need to bring the following essentials:

What you need for caving:

A complete set of warm old clothes to cave in (like thermals or sporty clothes). A warm long-sleeved top preferably in a manmade fibre such as fleece is good. Jeans or shorts are not at all suitable.

If you have one, a Primark 'onesie' is ideal.

For footwear we recommend Welly Boots. Trainers or walking boots are NOT suitable. There are plenty of wellies to borrow if you don't own any!

Cave snacks like Chocolate (or other energy dense robust snacks) in a sealed plastic wrapper (e.g. Mars, Snickers). You will appreciate it when you need that extra boost of energy underground.

### Other things you NEED to bring:

- A set of **warm** clothes for when you're not caving. (Be warned any clothes you bring will probably get mud on them so best not to bring white or fancy clothes).
- Waterproof jacket.
- A sleeping bag. You can borrow from the club, but they are not many so book it quick! You can purchase a cheap one from any outdoor shop (Trespas, Blacks, Mountain Warehouse, Go Outdoors) for about £20. Truly a great investment.
- Personal toiletries.
- A FULL water bottle.
- An old towel.
- Personal snacks.
- Gloves. Washing up gloves or cheap flexible gardening gloves are also handy to stop your fingers from getting cold.
- Remember to bring your own booze (or other drinks) for the weekend.
- Please label all your possessions. Anything left at the hut and not claimed soon after will end up in the club's possession.

The Hut is in the Woods. There is a long drop toilet. There is running water, fires for warmth, gas hobs to cook on. There is NO WIFI, and only limited phone service.

You will be in nature – enjoy it.

## **Costs and Other Notes**

### Costs

The costs of the weekends are described below but bring some with you just in case you end up stopping in a pub or café after caving.

For your first trip you don't have to buy anything! Kit can be hired from UBSS for a small fee (less than £5)!

The Mendip weekend will cost about £20. This includes transport, kit hire, hut fees and food.

For the South Wales weekend, we will work out what everyone owes for kit hire, food, transport and hut fees after the weekend. The cost for this weekend is likely to be £25-£35.

*Drivers will be reimbursed fuel money plus 20%*

If you have any questions or problems, ask at the Chilli Night or speak to the Student President or Secretary via WhatsApp. You can also message any of the committee members. You can also message us on Instagram and we will do our best to respond!

Vegetarians (or any other dietary requirements) will be catered for if you let us know in advance.

If you need to borrow any sleeping bags or wellies, let us know in advance so we can be sure that we have enough.

## **Menstruating Underground**

It might seem daunting the thought of having a period underground. Cavers who menstruate are more likely to be impacted by painful cramps, feeling cold and staying cold, feeling weaker, slower, and more lethargic.

Don't Worry! If you don't want to go on a wet trip or a really long trip let your leader know and you can decide on another cave to do.

You can wear any period product underground. However, pads are not suitable for wet caves. For wet caves we recommend tampons, menstrual cups/discs, and period pants.

At the Hut there is a box of period supplies and a bin in the toilet– no need to stress about menstruating in the woods!

Within UBSS you can talk to any of the committee members especially the Equality Sec or a female committee member. We're always happy to help and listen.

An interesting article on menstruating and caving is *Underground Pains* by Anna Taylor in Descent Magazine 295.



## **Women & Gender Diverse Caving**

For decades Caving has been a male dominated sport and in recent years groups have formed for Women and Gender Diverse Cavers (Such as the Speleo-Sisters on Facebook). If you would like to cave with other women and gender diverse cavers you can join our group chat on WhatsApp!

## **UBSS Activities**

### Caving:

We are fortunate to be based in a caving region, a mere 15 miles from the Mendip Hills and all the speleological delights they have to offer. This proximity allows us to cave throughout the week. This is usually planned on an informal basis, in the pub on Tuesdays or by the WhatsApp group. We also have weekend events taking place in the Mendip (where we stay at our own hut) and in other regions include South Wales, Derbyshire, and Yorkshire.

During holiday periods it is common for members to take trips abroad, either to visit already discovered caves or to go on expeditions to find new ones. In recent years we have been to Ireland, Austria, France and Mulu in Eastern Malaysia.

### Training Sessions:

These occur on weekday evenings, sometimes preceding the pub meet Details will be sent out by the Training Officer via WhatsApp.

We run a series of training sessions so that you can learn some of the more technical aspects of caving. These training sessions cover rope work, knots, ladder work and SRT (Single Rope Technique). SRT is used to move through unclimbable vertical sections of cave and involves abseiling down and on the return, climbing up the rope using mechanical jammers. Many Yorkshire and Derbyshire caves require SRT, hence it is advisable that you attend these training sessions. Kit for training sessions will be provided although you will need to pay a small amount to purchase some 'cowstails'.

There may also be advanced sessions for more experienced members, but we will let you know when you are ready for these.

### Presentations:

There will be a series of lectures and talks throughout the year, usually taking place on Tuesday evenings in the Stables (The Museum). These will be announced in due course via the WhatsApp Group, Instagram and Facebook, and Email.

Topics might include cave conservation, introduction to caving, cool trips, reports on summer expeditions, caving abroad. These lectures are suitable for newcomers, sometimes there will even be food.

### Social Events:

Every Tuesday, the club meets at a pub around 8pm. This is where most trips are arranged, so if you want to go caving or just want to meet some people, come along. (Location subject to change, keep an eye on WhatsApp or Instagram. Ask our social secretary if you have questions).

We also have numerous socials and caving weekends throughout term time, with some stable events including Bonfire Weekend in November and the Annual Dinner after our AGM in March. Keep an eye out as there will be more talks, socials and weekends announced throughout term time.

## **UBSS Facilities**

**The Stables** house our Museum and Library. They are to be found behind 21 Woodland Road. Access is via a committee member.

The **Library** houses one of the finest collections of caving books and journals in the country. We obtain a great many British and foreign publications by way of exchanging our Proceedings for the journals produced by other clubs and organisations. We also have a large number of cave surveys and a good collection of maps, covering in particular, Mendip and Co.Clare, Eire. New caving books are constantly being added to the library and you will also be

able to find guidebooks and information on most caving and mining areas in this country, as well as abroad.

Most books and some other materials may be borrowed by members, with the exception of some unique and valuable items and journals (except by special arrangement with the librarian). Everything borrowed must be signed out by a committee member in the book provided and kept for no longer than four weeks. A copy of the library rules is on display in the 'Stables'. Our librarian (see Contacts section) is willing to help anyone doing research, so if you require specific information then ask, and if we haven't got what you want, you can probably be pointed in the right direction.

The **Museum** contains a very good collection of archaeological material mainly from the Mendip area, which is available to anyone studying the local prehistoric and Roman periods. There is also an excellent comparative bone collection - useful for discovering what really is in those hall meals! Members of the society have been involved in, amongst other things, excavations of Goughs cave in Cheddar and at Westbury-sub-Mendip Quarry.

There is an excellent display of some of our best material, along with a historical exhibit about our club, on the ground floor. Anybody is most welcome to come and view the museum - it is best to contact our curator (see Contacts section) find the best time. There is still work continuing on the collection, often on Tuesday nights before going to the pub, so if you feel like helping, do get in contact.

The club's **Tackle Store** is situated in the Richmond building. It can be found round the back of the building by the loading bay. This is often the meeting place for caving trips. Access is through committee members.

All equipment borrowed must be signed out in the book provided, and must be returned straight after use, cleaned (the tackle store has washing facilities) and ropes properly coiled. Further details of kit and how to look after it is available in the tackle store.



**We also have our own cosy Hut to stay in on Mendip!**

## **Caving Equipment and Where To Buy It**

Caving equipment can be divided into two areas - group equipment i.e. ladders, ropes etc. (which the club provides) and personal equipment (which you provide). This section describes the personal equipment you will need to keep you warm, let you see, protect your head and stop you losing your footing on wet, muddy rocks.

### **Getting Started:**

The only things you really need to start off with are a pair of Wellingtons and some warm old clothes. 'Onesies' - available from Primark for about £15 - are very useful, as they drain water efficiently, and save you from getting an entire set of clothes wet. They are also surprisingly warm.

Over the top of your clothes you will be wearing a purpose built 'oversuit'. These are rented from the club and are included in your Kit Hire. They contain your body heat and offer some protection for your clothes.

Wellingtons can be bought from cheap shoe shops, outdoor shops. Shoes NOT suitable are walking boots with lace hooks as the hooks can get caught on the wire ladders we use. And trainers are totally unsuitable, as they offer no protection and minimal grip.

The club has some lights, belts, and helmets, which are available for hire. A general rule of first come, first served operates, so it's best to book them in advance.

The club also owns four SRT kits for hire at £5 for a day. Lights and SRT kits may be obtained from the Tackle Warden - see Contact Details section.

### **When You're Ready To Spend Some Money:**

Getting properly equipped means you will be able to go on longer and more interesting trips. Feel free to ask more experienced members for advice before making purchases.

The first specialist clothing people buy are usually kneepads which prevent bruised knees and protect your clothing. They cost approximate £20-£35.

A furrysuit (Undersuit) and Oversuit are probably next on the list. Furrysuits, also known as Undersuits, consist of a one-piece fibre-pile (fleece) undersuit and cost about £50. After getting wet, the fibre-pile drains very quickly and warms up again in a few minutes. To protect this and yourselves, an oversuit is worn. It is about £90 but occasionally, second-hand caving suits are available to buy.

The alternatives to a furrysuit are a wetsuit or neofleece. Members usually get these after furrysuits, as an alternative option for wet caves only. They are from about £80 new or find one second-hand. If opting for a new wetsuit, it is best to buy one specifically designed for caving. Wetsuits are good for wet caves as they give you buoyancy and keep you warm, but are restricting and can be very cold when you are not moving. A compromise is a neofleece (half wetsuit, half fleece).

Owning your own light is extremely useful and you will save money in the long run. There are several models and brands to choose from, varying in price. The most popular brand is currently Fenix. You will also need a helmet to put your light on. It must be a proper caving helmet (costing about £35 to £55).

Other extremely useful pieces of kit that aren't expensive include a heavy-duty caving belt, survival bag, buff and gloves.

For SRT you will need cowstails (ask an experienced member to help you get the right type and length of rope for this) and when you are feeling rich, then a full SRT kit.

As with anything, if you have any questions about kit, feel free to ask any of the more experienced members and committee.

### Where To Buy Caving Gear In And Near Bristol:

Millets, Blacks and Go Outdoors sell camping gear, sleeping bags, wellingtons etc.

### Caving Shops In Other Areas And Online:

Starless River is good for buying gear online and tours the countries caving areas. [www.starlessriver.com](http://www.starlessriver.com)

Inglesport (Yorkshire) - we usually call in when we are in the area. It has an online shop [www.inglesport.co.uk](http://www.inglesport.co.uk)

Caving Supplies (Derbyshire) - Visit it at [www.caving-supplies.co.uk](http://www.caving-supplies.co.uk)

### Hiring Equipment:

The club has some lights, belts, helmets and SRT kits which are available for hire. Details of hire charges are available in the tackle store or ask a committee member.

On club weekends, the trip organiser will arrange these for you if you let them know when signing up for the trip.

## **A Brief UBSS History**

The history of the UBSS (University of Bristol Spelaeological Society) ought to begin in 1919 when the society was founded but, as might be expected, this is only half the story. The direct predecessor was known as the Bristol Speleological Research

Society (BSRS) and was formed in the spring of 1912. Its object was to study caves in a more scientific manner than had previously been thought necessary. The Society had four original projects: the attempted re-opening of Plumley's Hole in Burrington Combe; the re-exploration of Lamb Leer Cavern; the measurement of the evaporation in Eastwater cavern and an archaeological excavation in Avelines Hole, also in Burrington. This latter cave proved to be very important for the study of early man on Mendip, as the excavation unearthed a large number of palaeolithic skulls and other bones. More recently (2002), it has been suggested as the oldest 'cemetery' in Britain, at around 9000 years old.

## **Books, Magazines and Online Resources**

### Books on Caving Techniques:

Caving Practice and Equipment - ed. D. Judson. All the advice in this book is sound.

The Complete Caving Manual. Andy Sparrow. Another book on skills and safety.

Alpine Caving Techniques: A Complete Guide to Safe and Efficient Caving. Marbach,

Tourte and Alspaugh. Ideal for learning about SRT techniques.



### Other Caving Books:

Mendip Underground - D. Irwin, A.Jarratt. THE guide to most of the caves on Mendip.

The Cave Explorers - Jim Eyre. A very funny book about early exploration in the Yorkshire Dales and abroad.

The Darkness Beckons - M. Farr. All about cave diving if you're that way inclined!

Aquanaut – R. Stanton. The Story of the Thai cave rescue.

### Magazines:

Descent - A bimonthly magazine which contains general news and longer articles.

BCA Newsletter - The bimonthly newsletter of the British Caving Association.

### Online Caving Information:

[ukcaving.com/board/index.php](http://ukcaving.com/board/index.php) – forum for the whole caving community in the UK

cavediggers.com/vertical/ - good book on techniques by Al Warild available free

online.

Darkness Below - [www.darknessbelow.co.uk](http://www.darknessbelow.co.uk) Caving news and articles from around

the world but primarily the UK

### U.B.S.S. PUBLICATIONS

The Newsletter:

The newsletter is produced monthly and is distributed to all club members by email. Contributions such as trip reports, drawings and cartoons are always welcome and should be handed to the editors (see contact sections)

Proceedings:

This is our annual scientific publication, and covers all aspects of cave and karst, including geomorphology, cave biology, prehistory and the history of cave studies. The authors range from students, staff and other members to international authorities on various subjects. Proceedings is one of the few caving journals that is professionally printed and bound and the only one where all of the papers are refereed by independent experts before acceptance. Proceedings is available to students at a reduced rate.

## **Caving Areas in Great Britain**

Mendip:

The Mendip hills are a beautiful part of the Somerset countryside. Being so close, it is where the majority of our caving trips take place. The Mendips have a large number of caves, offering a wide variety of trips.

One of your first trips is likely to be in Burrington where there are plenty of small but exciting caves such as Goatchurch Cavern and Sidcot Swallet. Swildons Hole offers much in the way of formations and an exciting

streamway with waterfalls and pools. The total passage length of Swildons Hole is around 5 miles, making it one of the largest and most famous caves on Mendip. GB (named after Goddard and Baker, the UBSS members who first discovered it) has the largest underground passage on Mendip and offers plenty of excellent formations. UBSS are currently digging in GB and Wookey Hole, and you may want to get involved with this exciting aspect of caving which involves removing spoil from choked passages in the hope of breaking through into territory where nobody has ever been.

Mendip caves are characterised by a steeply descending entrance, often levelling out at depth and ending in a sump. Few Mendip caves exceed 500ft in depth or a couple of miles in length but what they lack in quantity, they make up for in quality or variety with noisy streamways, fine grottos, squeezes and large chambers.

#### The Yorkshire Dales:

Without a doubt, the Dales contain some of the country's finest and most spectacular caves. Most involve SRT (Single Rope Technique) which can be learnt at training sessions. In a typical Yorkshire cave (if there is such a thing) you would follow an underground stream, cascading down a series of pitches (vertical drops) until it levels out to reveal an extensive network of passages, normally ending in sumps. Because of large, active streamways, the passages are normally much bigger than on Mendip.

A lot of the caves are situated around the "Three Peaks" area (Ingleborough, Pen-y-Ghent and Wharfedale). You may well visit one of the following caves when you are up in the area. Gaping Gill, on the flank of Ingleborough, contains an impressive 100m shaft into Gaping Gill Main Chamber, forming the highest single-drop waterfall in Britain. The Main Chamber is the second largest underground chamber in the country and although it is possible to descend the main shaft directly, the most common way in is through one of the other four entrances. On the other side of Ingleborough is Alum Pot which is a vast open hole in the ground over 80m deep. Again, it is more usual to get to the bottom of this via other routes with smaller pitches (drops). The Lancaster-Easegill System is one of the longest cave systems in the country. At the bottom of the system is a fine stream passage which makes the visit most memorable.

A description of Yorkshire would not be complete without mentioning the Helwith Bridge Inn which has a good selection of ales and is where you will find many other cavers.

### South Wales:

Welsh caves tend to have developed along gentle gradients and can form vast horizontal networks. Many caves in South Wales have large passages with streams flowing down them and so a wetsuit is useful or even essential in some places.

A cave frequently visited by the club is Ogof Ffynnon Ddu (OFD.); the deepest cave in Britain (1010 ft). Being over 40 miles in length, there is something for everyone, from awesome streamways to stunning formations. This cave is part of the "Big Five". The others are Dan-yr-Ogof (starts in a show cave), Agen Allwedd ('Aggie'), Ogof-y-Daren Cilau (known for its entrance crawl and underground camps) and Ogof Craig-a-Ffynnon.

Another cave worthy of mention is Little Neath River Cave. It was first explored by members of the UBSS in 1967. This wet cave carries the whole of the Afon Nedd (River Neath) as it sinks underground into the limestone.

### Derbyshire:

A feature of Derbyshire caves is the number of systems which combine both natural caves and mines. The area contains a wide variety of trips, most of which involve SRT but a few do not, such as Carlswark and Streaks.

P8 is an exciting streamway cave but is also ideal for learning SRT in, as is Knotlow. Titan contains the largest known shaft in Britain at 141.5 metres deep. This connects with several other fine caves including Peak Cavern and JH (James Hall Over Engine Mine).

### Devon:

Small passages and copious amounts of mud abound in Devon caves. Very pleasant sections can be found, however, if you are willing to try hard enough. There are very few stream systems and most of the larger caves are

dry phreatic mazes, such as the Bakers-Reeds System (length c.3km) and Pridhamsleigh Cavern (length c.1km).

A wide variety of metals were mined in Devon. Many of these mine workings are still open and of considerable size and interest. The Dartmoor tin mines are quite entertaining, with plenty of water and few access problems. Scientifically, the area is of considerable interest, with some of Britain's most important bone caves and archaeological sites, such as Kent's Cavern. Also of interest are the coastal caves around Torbay and granite caves on Dartmoor.

### Forest of Dean:

The Forest of Dean is home to the well-known cave Otter Hole. This is near a tidal river and so anyone wanting a reasonable length trip enters while the tide is low and then the entrance will seal up with water while the tide is high, and they are in the cave. The trips are timed to come out when the tide has lowered again. Other popular caves are Slaughter Stream Cave and Miss Graces Lane. There are many mines in the area too.

## **What is a Call Out?**

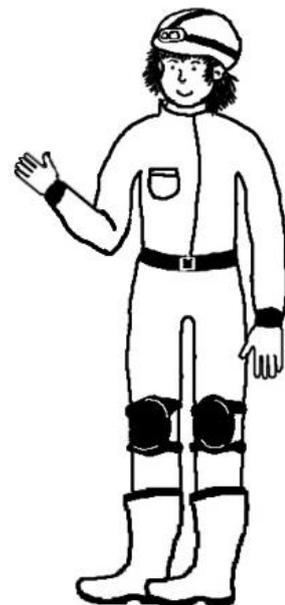
Cavers implement a 'Call Out' **every time** they go underground. Essentially, the leader lets someone experienced in Caving know that they are going underground, what cave, who is with them, and how long they are going to be.

This ensures that if anything goes wrong underground and the cavers miss their call out **help will come.**

Call outs are needed on **EVERY** trip. (As a fresher you wont be expected to organise this).

### Making a Call Out

When taking a call out, write down; the first and last names of everyone in the group, what cave, what route they are following, how long they need, what predicted time they expect to be out, car description and registration.



### How to call a rescue team:

- Call 999
- Ask for 'Police' -mobile calls may go to the wrong Police force; say which county you are in!
- Ask the Police for 'cave rescue'
- Say where you are (give description and grid reference)
- Describe the problem (and answer any other questions)
- Stay by the phone or where your mobile works (keeping the line care so you can be called back. The rescue team will call other services as needed)