

How to Plan for a Trip to Chiricahua Crystal Cave

Chiricahua Crystal Cave is a moderately large cave (2.38 miles total passage) in Cochise County, Arizona, within the boundaries of the Douglas Ranger District of the Coronado National Forest. It is primarily horizontal, with a handful of short drops less than 20 feet deep. Although most of the cave is relatively easy for most cavers, a few sections require some climbing skill. It can be enjoyed by cavers of varying levels of experience. **The cave is closed from April 15 - October 15** to protect a maternity colony of bats.

Caving can be done safely, but like all outdoor activities, it carries some risk. Caving requires a certain level of physical fitness and endurance, the right equipment, and preparation. Please consider the following before you decide to go caving:

- Crystal Cave is a wild cave. There are no easy-to-follow trails and visitors may easily become lost. Surfaces can be rough and rocky, and many places require both hands and feet to maneuver over or around formations and rocks. Trips, slips, and fall hazards exist throughout the cave, with serious consequences for climbing errors. Trips to certain parts of the cave require more advanced knowledge and skill; some crawlways are less than two ft. in diameter, and some chimney climbs have exposures of over 40 ft.
- Children (under 18 yrs. old) must be accompanied by a parent or guardian. While it is up to the parents and trip leader to decide if a child can go on a trip, be aware that Crystal has some challenges that will make travel difficult for them, especially if their guides are also unfamiliar with the cave.

REQUIRED EQUIPMENT

- Helmet with a chinstrap and an attached headlamp
- Small pack for carrying sufficient water, snacks, a pee bottle, 2 back-up lights or headlamps (not a smart phone), extra batteries, and some first aid supplies
- Gloves are required to protect the cave from skin oils.
- Boots or shoes with good traction and tread; sneakers are not recommended
- Knee and elbow pads; Crystal has many sharp (and hard) quartz crystals as well as many crawlways that required inching the body over these crystals. Be prepared for your clothing to get torn.

PROPER CAVING ETIQUETTE/RULES FOR VISITING CRYSTAL CAVE

Caves are unique and fragile ecosystems that take thousands of years to form. Visitors to Crystal Cave are required to *cave softly* and *leave no trace* in order to preserve this remarkable, non-renewable resource for the enjoyment of future visitors. There are guidelines and rules for everyone visiting Crystal Cave which are detailed in the permit paperwork. By signing the permit, visitors attest to reading, understanding, and abiding by the rules. In addition, caves and cave animals are granted special protection by The Arizona Cave Protection Law (1977), and The Federal Cave Resources Protection Act (1988). Penalties for damaging caves are severe.

HOW TO VISIT CRYSTAL CAVE

Before you can plan a trip to Crystal Cave, your group must have an approved trip leader. You may apply to be a trip leader or request a reservation for a cave trip at: <http://bit.ly/AZCaveKeyRequest>. You will be contacted by a scheduler within a few days, and if approved, you will receive a permit with more specific information and instructions. All participants must read these materials, fill out the permit completely, and sign it. After final approval by the District Ranger, the key can be obtained for a \$100 deposit either at the Douglas Ranger Station, or from one of three, local volunteer key holders. Please make your request 3 weeks in advance to ensure availability of the desired date, and time to complete the process.

LOCAL CAVING CLUBS

Another option is to contact one of the local grottos (caving clubs) to inquire about joining a trip with experienced cavers. This option is recommended for those who are inexperienced with wild caving, or unfamiliar with Crystal Cave. Visiting the cave with experienced cavers will give you the opportunity to learn about and see more of the cave.

Grottos are chapter organizations of the National Speleological Society (NSS). They welcome anyone interested in caves and caving to come to their monthly meetings and join them on cave trips. The grottos in Southern Arizona are partnering with Coronado National Forest to advise and assist with cave management. For caving-specific questions, and more information about local grottos in Tucson and Cochise County, please send an email to caveschedulers@gmail.com.

WEBSITES:

<https://caves.org>

<http://www.escabrosa.org/>

<http://sagrotto.caves.org/>