

SPELUNKING | CAVING

Upper and Lower Caving Schedules

For those with proper preparation (see our release forms) but having no reservation: **Lower Caving** (the three hour trip) is offered at 10:00 am, every day, seven days a week from the first day open through the last Sunday of October. **Upper Caving** (the two hour trip) is offered at 2:00 pm, every day, seven days a week, from the first day open through the last Sunday of October. For groups of six or more, with a prepaid appointment, other arrangements can be made to accommodate your group (phone 724-438-3003).

Before coming for either trip, carefully read the release form of the spelunking trip you want (upper or lower). Be prepared (especially with two sources of light, long pants, a long-sleeved shirt, and shoes with good tread and ankle support), and be sure to allow enough travel time.

For reasons of safety we cannot catch-you-up with a caving trip already departed.

Flashlights are available in our gift shop at reasonable prices.

For schools, churches, scout groups, summer camps, and so forth wanting a private guide and group rates, reservations must be made 10 days prior to visit (phone 724-438-3003).

Caving is the more contemporary term for what is popularly called spelunking. It refers to going into a cave completely in its natural state. Due to its conservation mission, Laurel Caverns is the only developed cave in the world having its largest rooms and passages completely in their original state. Because the elevation difference from the **upper passages** of Laurel Caverns to its **lower passages** is about 45 stories (450 feet) **two caving activities** (i.e. spelunking) have been created. For the most part, these two trips cover different parts of the cave, though both have in common the main passages of the traditional tour as well as the ballroom and the bat room.

VERY IMPORTANT

Both trips require participants to bring at least two good sources of light. Also, each must wear long pants, a long sleeved shirt, and shoes with good tread and ankle support. Laurel Caverns will supply the hard hats. Each participant must also fill out and sign a release form. Links to the forms can be found below. The cave temperature is 52 degrees. Bring a change of clothing; this is a real caving trip and participants will get the wet sands of the cave on their clothing.

PREPAREDNESS POINTS EMPHASIZED BY THE LAUREL CAVERNS CAVING STAFF

For those who wish to self-outfit for Lower Caving.

(Please don't confuse this trip with our easy family guided tour.)

#1 PROPER CLOTHING

Proper caving shoes are not reusable to an outfitter. Coveralls would have to be laundered after each use and the sand in them makes that very expensive. Lights could be rented but when that was tried they usually disappeared, so now they can only be sold. Thus, if Laurel Caverns outfits you for lower caving, the cost is \$85 per person. But, if you outfit yourself, the cost is \$30 per person (groups \$25) for lower caving and \$25 per person for upper caving (groups \$20).

#2 PROPER LIGHT SOURCES

Remember that two sources of light are required. A headlamp and a handheld light are best. Cellphone lights, keychain lights, and other such dim sources are not acceptable.

#3 PROPER FOOT WEAR

The only shoes that are acceptable are lace-up hiking boots with good tread and ankle support that comes at least 1 inch above the ankle. Some shoes, like basketball shoes cover the ankle, but lack the needed tread. If you are wearing a shoe that lacks good tread or comes below the ankle you will only be allowed to go in the upper parts of the cave. A twisted ankle can involve a basket rescue and upwards of forty people. The last twisted ankle rescue took nearly six hours to complete and a staffer suffered a knee injury in the process. (The staff has requested that those who wear flip-flops or sandals only be admitted to the traditional family guided tour and those who choose to wear no shoes at all not even be allowed in the visitors' center.)

#4 CAVING EXTRAS

Real cavers prefer coveralls. But, a long-sleeved shirt and long pants are acceptable. Wearing shorts and short-sleeved shirts can lead to abrasions. The surface of cave rocks can be like sand paper.

#5 RELEASE FORMS

For everyone under 18 years the Laurel Caverns release form must be signed by a parent or legal guardian. Scout leaders, summer camp staffers, older brothers, relatives a minor might be visiting, etc. are not legal guardians. This form can be found at this website.

#6 PROMPT START TIMES

Caving trips start at 10:00 am and 2:00 pm. Laurel Caverns is surrounded by about a hundred square miles of forest lands crisscrossed with old township rights of ways that are now hiking trails, gas lines, or just plain trees. GPS thinks they are public roads and this can get people lost. Allow lots of time to get to Laurel Caverns if you do not know where it is. Our staff has taken the stance that late attendees will miss much of the orientation and therefore are a safety risk to themselves and others. They have requested that no late attendees will be admitted. Further, late attendees will hold up the group and this is not fair to those who made a proper effort to get here on time.

#7 POLICIES ARE FOR SAFETY

Please forgive us for the strict enforcement of these policies. We are regulated by the Bureau of Deep Mine Safety even though we are a natural cave. We are, by law, required to follow their protocols, especially with respect to rescues. Twisted ankles have to be treated as broken until X-rayed. Caving is a high adventure activity and can be dangerous. The terrain is rough and uneven. It is not a stroll through a shopping mall. Please don't prepare for our lower caving trip as if it is. Upper caving is safer because it lacks the cliff structures found further down the inside of the mountain.

Note: both the upper and lower spelunking tours are staff assisted, which means that a staff member will accompany groups through the spelunking tour. There are no self-guided tours at Laurel Caverns.

The orientation start time for both the upper and lower spelunking tours are 10:00 AM and 2:00 PM

For Upper Caving allow two hours. For Lower Caving allow up to 30 minutes for orientation and up to three hours as your “in the cave time.” Exit time can be adjusted for groups needing an early departure.

Rain is never a problem – This is a great rainy day activity

Reservations

Reservations for the traditional and modified-traditional tours are not needed; but, it is helpful if large groups let us know in advance they are coming. (See Educational Field Trips – bus and youth groups enter upon arrival.)

Cameras

Cameras are welcome in the caverns, but please, no video recorders.

UPPER CAVING

Upper Caving begins at the cave entrance in the Visitors’ Center and combines the one hour tour with a second hour in the upper portions of the large rooms of the undeveloped cave.

Participants **must** be at least **9 years of age**. Because it is less rigorous than Lower Caving, even many adults prefer it to Lower Caving. It is suggested that children under nine years of age take the Traditional Guided Tour and strongly suggested that the physically challenged carefully consider the strenuous nature of a caving trip. On this exploring adventure there is much climbing up and over rocks. Injuries can occur from this kind of climbing and participants must respect the points made by the release form. Allow two hours for this activity.

UPPER CAVING RELEASE FORM

PRICING FOR UPPER CAVING

\$25 PER PERSON

There is a \$5 per person discount for groups of 15 or more with a prepayment.

EDUCATIONAL FIELD TRIPS

See Educational Field Trips for more on a group visit.

PLEASE NOTE: No individual(s) under the age of 18 may participate in either the Upper Caving Activity or the Lower Caving Activity unless an adult having supervisory authority for the individual(s) is on the entire trip through the cave with them.

LOWER CAVING

(Please note that open-registration (no reservations needed) Lower Caving is only available on Saturdays and Sundays.

Lower Caving also begins at the cave entrance in the Visitors' Center but takes you almost to the bottom of the mountain, 45 stories down from that entrance. Participants **must** be at least **12 years of age**. The trip permits the visitor to see over two miles of cave covering both the undeveloped cave and the lighted portion. The trip takes about three hours. Most of the passages are between ten and forty feet high. It is suggested that children under twelve years of age take the Traditional Guided Tour or the Upper Caving Tour and strongly suggested that the physically challenged carefully consider the strenuous nature of a three hour caving trip 45 stories down in elevation. On this exploring adventure there is much climbing up and over rocks. Injuries can occur from this kind of climbing and participants must respect the points made by the release form.

LOWER CAVING RELEASE FORM

PRICING FOR LOWER CAVING

\$30 PER PERSON

There is a \$5 per person discount for groups of 15 or more with a prepayment.

EDUCATIONAL FIELD TRIPS

See Educational Field Trips for more on a group visit.

PLEASE NOTE: No individual(s) under the age of 18 may participate in either the Upper Caving Activity or the Lower Caving Activity unless an adult having supervisory authority for the individual(s) is on the entire trip through the cave with them.

Please see the homepage for the days open for this season. We are open from mid-April through the last Sunday in October. The traditional Tour and Modified Traditional Tour are offered every day, without exception. We are even open on holidays. When the first ticket for the "next tour" is sold a twenty minute countdown is started. With this rule, no one need wait more than twenty minutes for the one hour tour. The visitors' center opens every day at 9:00 AM. The last tour of the day enters at 4:30 PM.