

# GUCA Information Pack:

## Who we are/ what we do

We are Glasgow University Caving Association (GUCA) and we are a student run caving club. We run regular (usually monthly) caving trips which are for the whole weekend and involve travelling to caving areas – usually Yorkshire, Assynt (Northern Scotland), or the peak district – and staying in a caving hut there to go caving! We also run weekly training sessions to teach the necessary skills, particularly SRT (single rope technique) which allows us to access caves with vertical drops using ropes. There are weekly socials too so come along and get to know everyone!

## How to get involved

- Become a member (link in Instagram bio, you also need a GUSA sport peak membership)
- Follow our Instagram to get updates
- Come to a social – you can see where we'll be on the Whatsapp chat
- Come to training – sign up on the GUSA website
- Message us – you can DM us on Instagram or email our captain ([captain-caving@gusa.gla.ac.uk](mailto:captain-caving@gusa.gla.ac.uk)), we'd love to hear from you!
- Come on a trip – We'd recommend coming to a training session first since it's easier to teach SRT outside the cave first, but if you can't make it you can still come on trips!

## Trips

### How it works

Our trips run monthly and are from 5pm on Friday until late on Sunday when we get back. We go by minibus and drive to a caving hut where we stay for two nights. We go caving on Saturday and some people also go caving on Sunday depending on how they feel, others have a relaxing day or a walk on Sunday. In the evenings we talk, play games, and usually have some drinks.

Breakfasts and dinner on Saturday are included in the trip as we cook communally. We eat a large breakfast and skip lunch since we are usually in a cave at this time. We usually buy our own dinners on Friday and snacks for the weekend at a supermarket, where we stop halfway through the drive for shopping, though feel free to bring food too. On the way back we stop at a services halfway through the drive to get food.

We provide you with most of the kit including oversuit, undersuit, helmet, headtorch, and SRT kit, but you will bring your own wellies, kneepads (optional but saves you from a lot of bruises), gloves (cheap work gloves are best), and sleeping bag. The club has some wellies and sleeping bags to lend out but not enough for everyone so you will need to let us know in advance if you want to borrow these and we give priority to international students.

## What to bring

- Clothes – multiple changes of clothes, with plenty of warm layers
- Base layers – to go under your undersuit in the cave. Synthetic clothing is best since cotton loses heat easily when wet. Leggings and synthetic tops are good, and fleeces for an extra layer if you get cold easily.
- Towel
- Warm socks or wet socks (again cotton socks lose heat easily and your feet will almost certainly get wet in the cave)
- Wellies
- Kneepads – optional but recommended
- Gloves – work gloves or gardening gloves are best (and cheap too)
- Sleeping bag
- Toiletries
- Snacks
- Portable charger – optional but if you have one it is very useful
- Walking boots – We might go hiking on Sunday so walking boots or good shoes are useful
- Your ID if you wish to buy alcohol on the way

On Sunday evening we get back very late – often 11pm to midnight, sometimes even later. The bus drops people off either at the library or at the kit stop where kit is taken to someone's flat, which is often closer for some people since it is usually in the Finnieston area. **Please ensure you know how to get home safely at this time**, if you need to wait for a taxi someone can wait with you.

If you want to be fully prepared and know what to expect you can see the detailed breakdown of how trips work [here](#).

## Training

We run training sessions every week at the Stevenson building, you need to sign up to these beforehand so that we can track numbers (See the GUSA website or the link in our Instagram bio).

At these sessions we teach you SRT starting with the basics and then teaching further skills such as knots and rigging the ropes as you progress.

SRT is short for single rope technique and we use this to go deeper into caves which have large drops. This involves ascending and descending a rope, traversing along areas with drops below them, and navigating more complicated rope setups to suit the cave. It is easier to teach SRT outside of the cave since the pitches in caves often have limited space or are noisy due to being at waterfalls. It can also get cold while we teach people in caves, so it is best to come to training first where you will gain these skills in a more controlled environment (and with shorter drops).

## Socials

We have weekly socials where we go to the pub, and we also run a variety of different socials either before or instead of the pub socials, which include climbing, film nights, pub quizzes, and other fun outings. You can see our socials on Instagram or our What's app group.

## In the cave

### Basic equipment

- Undersuit – we provide you with an undersuit which is essentially a fleece overall/onesie to keep warm
- Oversuit – We also provide an oversuit which is made of a thicker and slightly water resistant material to protect your clothes from rough stones and mud
- Helmet – We also give you a helmet to protect your head
- Headtorch – We then put a headtorch on the helmet so everyone can see!
- SRT kit – If you are going in a cave which requires SRT we will also give you an SRT kit

### How it works

When we go caving we split into small groups of about 3-7 which allows us to move faster in the cave, these groups usually go into different caves. Each group has a cave leader who is an experienced caver and is responsible for the group. They either know the route in the cave or bring directions and will lead the group through the cave, and are also responsible for ensuring everyone's safety, making sure that all the right kit is brought including water, spare snacks and first aid kits (rarely used don't worry). Often there is also a second in the group who helps with these responsibilities, especially in larger groups, in more experienced groups everyone shares these tasks.

There are various different types of caves we can go in, the most important thing being whether it is an SRT cave or not, since for SRT caves we will need to bring ropes harnesses and extra equipment, as well as ensuring that everyone has at least some SRT experience before doing SRT in a cave. Non-SRT caves are fun too and allow us to move a lot faster, and we will often bring beginners into a non-SRT cave first to get comfortable with the cave environment before worrying about SRT.

Most caves are wet, though this varies from crawling through puddles and getting slightly damp to walking in waist high streams. Some caves also require some climbing varying from scrambling up rocks to climbing ladders and scaffolding. There are also some tight squeezes which require patience to wriggle through. The group works together to ensure everyone gets past every obstacle.

The length of time we are in the cave depends entirely on which we are going in and the group. We often turn around before the deepest part due to tiredness, cold, or just taking longer than expected. Many caves don't have an 'end', so we turn back when we feel like it. Some caves also have multiple entrances or are part of larger systems and we may plan to do 'through trips' to come out at a different place than we went in.

In the cave everyone's safety is the most important thing, so at any point if anyone isn't feeling good or can't go on, the group may turn around or send them back with another person while the others continue. It is really important to tell the leader if you aren't feeling good so we can make the best decision. It is very easy to get cold in caves since being wet drains your heat fast, so while caving is generally quite safe, hypothermia is something we have to watch out for. We always carry emergency shelters (they are like a cross between a tent and an emergency blanket) which can help keep the heat in, along with candles and handwarmers as emergency heat sources.

## SRT

SRT stands for single rope technique. This is how we reach parts of the cave which would otherwise be inaccessible due to large drops. Essentially someone sets up a rope from anchors which are already in the cave, and then we use our SRT equipment to abseil down it, and then on the return trip we climb back up this rope using ascenders.

The main skills are ascending, which uses two ascenders attached to the harness, and descending which uses a descender. There are also two 'cowstails' which are lengths of rope with carabiners on the end attached to the harness which allow for extra safety and moving horizontally.

To learn SRT come to our training sessions which run weekly on Thursdays at 8:15 pm in the Stevenson building. We will also teach SRT at the taster sessions. We prefer you to have learnt some SRT before coming on trips, but if you can't make it you can still come as not all caves require SRT, and you can also be taught on the trips themselves if necessary.

See the Caving skills and SRT checklist (on our linktree or [here](#)) for more details about SRT equipment and what you will be taught at training sessions.

## Committee

- Captain – Andrew Dickie [captain-caving@gusa.gla.ac.uk](mailto:captain-caving@gusa.gla.ac.uk)
- Secretary – Ben Wilson [secretary-caving@gusa.gla.ac.uk](mailto:secretary-caving@gusa.gla.ac.uk)
- Treasurer – Harris Barton [treasurer-caving@gusa.gla.ac.uk](mailto:treasurer-caving@gusa.gla.ac.uk)
- Welfare officer – Ansel Sigerson [welfare-caving@gusa.gla.ac.uk](mailto:welfare-caving@gusa.gla.ac.uk)
- Kit officer – Rowan Tooze
- Social media - Hafiz Amin (contact via Instagram DMs)
- Social Secs - Witold Jankowski and Nicolo Vinti

If you have any questions please get in touch. You can DM us on Instagram or email us. Alternatively just come along to our any of our socials or training sessions – See Instagram for our upcoming socials, or sign up to a training session (the link is on the linktree). Remember that you need a peak GUSA sport membership to come to these training sessions, though by arrangement you can try out one session before purchasing this.

## **In detail breakdown of trips:**

This is a long and detailed description of how trips usually go, you do not need to read this unless you would like a better sense of what to expect.

In order to come on trips you need to get a ticket, we announce the ticket releases a few days before they go live, you will get an email about this if you are a member of the society. The tickets sell out very fast when there is high demand, so you may have to be fast sometimes. After securing a ticket, the secretary will be in touch with more information about the trip and the details of the club bank account for you to send the payment. We keep the trips as cheap as possible but the price of trips is not fixed due to the different costs of hut fees and petrol to reach the different caving huts we stay in.

The trip begins on Friday where we meet at the minibuses outside the University library entrance. We leave at 5pm sharp and cannot wait for you so please be on time, and let us know if you are running late (but do avoid running late, delays mean that we get to the hut very late). If you live near Garscube sports complex you can meet us there instead but you **MUST** let us know of this. We then get on the minibus and drive to pick up some of our kit at a committee member's flat, and then continue on to Garscube sport complex to pick up more kit. At Garscube we make a stop where everyone gets out and tries on undersuits and oversuits which are stored there. At this point you must try on undersuits and oversuits to find one that fits decently, as well as extra kit – wellies and sleeping bags - of which we have a limited number of to lend out, so bring your own if you have it and tell us in advance if you need to borrow these. Once you find under and oversuits that fit, you need to tell the kit officer (or other designated member if they are not on this trip) which numbers you have, and then take your kit. You are responsible for these for the rest of the trip and until kit return the week after getting back, so look after them.

We then set off properly for the drive. This can take anywhere from 4 to 6 hours including one stop for shopping depending on where we are heading (the drive is technically 3 hours to Yorkshire, 4.5 hours to the peak district, or 5 hours to Assynt in Scotland, but traffic and shopping can slow this down). Prepare for a long drive. We often pass the time by talking, listening to music, singing or sleeping; you are free to do whatever you want.

Approximately halfway through the trip we stop at a large supermarket to buy food for the trip, this is usually in Carlisle when we are heading south, and Perth or Inverness when heading north. Here you will be expected to buy your own dinner for the evening, any snacks you want for the trip, and any alcohol for the evenings (if you want to drink). Remember to bring your ID if you are buying alcohol. It is still a while until we reach the hut so most of us opt to buy food to eat on the bus, but you can buy something to cook at the hut if you are willing to wait. The committee also does a large shop here buying club food for the next two breakfasts and tomorrow's group dinner. After signing up for trips you will have been asked about any dietary requirements which will allow us to buy the right amounts. Breakfasts are usually a fry up with meat sausages/veggie sausages, hash browns, baked beans, toast, mushrooms, scrambled eggs/scrambled tofu (only if there are multiple vegans or people who would prefer this over eggs), and porridge and cornflakes are also available. We also have club tea, coffee, apple and orange juice. Dinner varies but is always vegetarian for ease of cooking.

Once we reach the hut we all have to unload our own and all the club kit from the bus and unpack the food in the kitchen. The huts all have a common room, a kitchen, bunk rooms, toilets, and a kit room. Everyone then needs to go and claim a bed to sleep in and make sure they have all of their kit. We then usually congregate in the common room and have some drinks, but it is up to you. We often play some fun caving games at this point. Go to bed whenever you feel like it, but be aware that some people tend to stay up very late.

Throughout the weekend everyone will need to do their share of the jobs that need doing including cooking, washing up, and cleaning. Two people will be assigned to cook breakfast in the morning and they will wake everyone up when it is ready. We will often organise the groups we will split into for caving over breakfast, though we will usually have some idea by the previous night. The cave leaders will decide the best split and which caves you will go in, but we will also ask your preferences and familiarity with SRT to help decide. Some people will need to clean up breakfast, and then everyone should get changed and prepared for caving.

Preparing for caving means that you should get into your base layers and undersuit, bring snacks for the cave (we will have some small chocolate bars available), and prepare a bag with a change of clothes (including underwear), and a towel, and bin bags to put wet and muddy kit in. This bag should then be either left in the kit room if you are walking to the cave, or taken with you onto the minibus if we are driving there. Once everyone is nearly ready you should get into your oversuit and wellies if you are walking to the cave, or make sure to bring them if you are getting on the minibus. If you are going to an SRT cave we will also sort out SRT kits at this point. You must also get a helmet from the helmet bag, and a headtorch if there is not one attached to the helmet. There are no batteries in these so you need to collect batteries from the charged battery bag also and check that the torch is working.

Once everyone in your group is ready we will set off to the cave. You may have to help the leader carry bags of rope and other kit. Then we cave!!

Once we get out of the cave we have to walk back either to the bus or to the caving hut. We get changed into dry clothes outside the bus or in the kit room of the hut (this is the much nicer option as there are also showers). The wet/muddy oversuit, wellies, clothes etc is put into bags if we have to drive back to the hut. At the hut all wet kit must be hung up to dry in the drying room, especially if you want to cave again the next day. Batteries must be taken out of headtorches and either put in the 'to be charged' battery bag or given to the kit officer to sort out. If you used an SRT kit this needs to be thoroughly washed in the river or outside with the hose (depending on the hut) to get off any mud, then hung up to dry.

Depending how late your group gets back there may be plenty of time in the evening or not. At some point one of the designated people will take charge of cooking dinner, and they may ask for help. If your group gets back late, dinner may be ready as soon as you get in which is often nice. Everyone then eats dinner, and afterwards some people wash up. We try to share the work so preferably people who didn't cook and don't have other responsibilities will wash up. We then have a nice evening, sometimes drinking again and sometimes just going to bed.

On Sunday the morning is essentially the same as Saturday, but if you don't plan on caving you can have a more relaxed morning. Again some people will be cooking breakfast and wake everyone up when it is ready. We will discuss who is actually caving and what groups to split into over breakfast.

Then anyone who is caving needs to prepare the same as the day before. Note that clothes, undersuits, and oversuits are often still wet so it is not the most pleasant getting ready but we will get wet again anyway when in the cave. People who don't go caving can stay at the hut or go for walks etc and there is only loose organisation for this. Anyone who doesn't cave also has to help clean the hut before we leave since caving groups won't have time for this.

Groups that cave on Sunday have a fairly strict time to be back since we aim to leave the hut at 5pm. It is best for anyone caving on Sunday to organise their stuff into packed bags before going caving so after getting back they only need to pack up wet caving clothes, clean SRT kits, and get on the bus.

Everyone need to aim to be packed and ready to get on the bus by 5pm, with the hut cleaned too. Often we actually leave a bit later but we don't want to get back to Glasgow too late.

(In some cases we will choose to clean the hut and leave before going caving so that we can drive to the caves and then go directly from there to speed things up.)

Once everyone is back, the bus is fully packed, all the kit is organised, the hut is clean, and everyone is ready we will start the drive back. About halfway we stop at a services and buy food at a fast food place (again optional, you can bring your own food or wait until you get home to eat if preferred). We usually get back quite late – often around 11pm or midnight, sometimes even later for the longer drives. Everyone is dropped off either at the library where we all met, or at the stop where we drop kit at someone's flat which can be closer for many people. Please make sure you know how to get home safely with all your stuff at this time, especially if you live further away from the university.