

Recommendations for descending the Gouffre Berger

From June 1st to 31st october

Appendix to Municipal regulations

According to rulings at the Prefecture 22 May 2000

Due to its reknown, depth and beauty the Gouffre Berger attracts many visitors. The cave presents no major difficulties under normal conditions, especially in the upper half, giving it its reputation as an "easy cave". The cave is nonetheless a 1000m deep cave with a very active master cave. Too many cavers over-estimate their capabilities and take too lightly the difficulties they will encounter.

In recent years there have been 6 cavers killed in this cave (5 due to the water) and there is on average a rescue call-out each year.

Every accident could lead to further regulations and a consequent reduction in freedom to go caving. Such accidents must be paid for out of public funds, but above all no cave is worth the loss of a life.

We hope that you will take note of the advice given here based on our experience ; this will help you enjoy your visit of the Berger and improve the degree of safety safety. **Respecting these recommendations is also important in order to gaurantee free access for future generations.**

1) Preparing your expedition

Fill in the attached form

Beforehand

- Take time to study the surveys, rigging guides, accounts of other expeditions and people that know the cave.
Published literature is available : Operation -1000, Berger premier -1000, Speleo Sportive, Grottes et Scialets du Vercors, account of the SCCM camp 1991 and just out Speleo dans le Vercors.
- Make contact with the previous team in order to get the latest information. Make contact with the following team in order to pass on information and if necessary to make arrangements with them in case of problems (for example a delay in de-rigging due to poor weather). Information is also available at the Mairie and from the CDS.
- Plan your accomodation in advance. There is a campsite in Autrans and several gites.

There is also a refuge at la Moliere within the Engins commune (tel 0609384242). Don't forget that camping outside of approved campsites is forbidden.

During your expedition

Beware of flooding ! During a storm or heavy rain, the Berger can become a dangerous trap. The water levels rise very quickly. Take care to get the weather forecast (**0 892 68 02 38** or the web site of [Météo France](#) or [Météo Isère](#)) just prior to your descent.

Remember weather forecasting is not an exact science and you should err on the side of caution. Observe carefully the waterlevel in local surface rivers and modify your plans accordingly.

If however despite these precautions you observe an increase in water flow, then take shelter in a safe place in order to avoid a possible flood pulse. Await a fall in water levels before returning to the surface.

A few safe locations are known :

- At -250 immediately to the left as you arrive in the "Grand Galerie"
- The "grand eboulis" [Big rubble heap] and the "Salle des Treize" [hall of 13]
- The "salle des couffinades [after the canals] up on the right after exiting the canal section
- The "salle Eymas" in the Grand Canyon.
- The "camp Etrangers" at the base of "ouragan" [the opposite side from the base of the hurricane pitch]

Hence these are normally the best places to stop to rest and eat.

All the other parts of the cave are dangerous or can even flood to the roof in the case of an exceptional flood.

During an ordinary small flood, the points in the cave that become particularly dangerous are:

- The Aldo pitch
- Lac Cadoux [if you forget the boat!]
- Or even worse, **all parts of the river from the "Vestiaire" to the bottom of the cave.**

Find these points on the survey, that you should take with you underground, and take the time to note [find] these points as you descend.

Safety Points

It is sensible to pack, in addition to your personal equipment:

- Pulleys, jammers and emergency lengths of rope and hangers to allow you to do self rescue in the case of minor problems. Don't undertake a self rescue that is beyond your ability.
- At the entry it is preferable to have:- a sack containing survival bags with strings and clothes pegs, karimat, warm [dry] clothes and sleeping bag, spare carbide, food and stove. And of course a First Aid kit.
- Underground, with each team, survival bags, warm [dry] clothes, spare carbide and a First Aid kit.

If you have a really big problem, contact the mountain rescue [secours en montagne] on 04 76 22 22 22, they will transmit the alert to the cave rescue team [Speleo Secours].

2) Running of the Expedition [unfolding, take place]

On the Surface

- Out of respect to walkers, it is asked that no tape route markers are placed. A system of route markers is in place using reflective tape [like Scotchlite] which is visible when returning from the cave. Each caver should get to know the access route and identify the path junctions. If you need extra markers use natural items such as cairns, branches etc.
- At the cave entrance leave a note book attached at the bottom of the first [entrance] pitch with details of:
 - Name and surname
 - Day and hour of entry
 - Objective
 - Date and time of exit
 - At your car, leave something to eat and drink *and* don't drive after a long caving trip and have had a night without sleep!

Rigging

- Rigging is entirely your responsibility. The cave is equipped for 8mm bolts, sometimes the sleeves are very old. Check them before use and put in new ones as necessary, but with economy and care. Attention:- The stud bolts are reserved for rescue purposes only. Do not forget to rig above the flood water levels! Certain parts can be rigged with natural belays. Certain parts are permanently rigged. They should be treated with great suspicion! Do not leave in place any rigging you find in dangerous condition: replace them and take out the old rigging.
- It is handy and pleasant to foresee a stop at the "Salle des Treize" [hall of 13] where a stock of carbide, food, stove and warm dry clothes can be left.
- **Bivouacking is not recommended** in the cave. **Remember that the water is used for drinking water at the source [Sassenage]**. If you decide you need to install a bivouac **do not use it during the descent** due to the increased risk from being out of contact

with and not knowing the up to date weather forecast. Of course all the camp equipment has to be carried back up out at the end. **Above all leave NOTHING behind; think of those who follow**

- It is not recommended to install a telephone for a rapid visit of the Gouffre Berger. However communication with the surface will increase safety. The "**Systeme Nicola**", allows communication directly through the limestone from the cave to the surface without the need to run telephone wires though the cave. This equipment is available to all teams descending the Gouffre Berger from:

Managing the Length of time of the trips

Most of the accidents in the Gouffre Berger have occurred whilst coming out, tiredness and lack of sleep contributing.

To go to the bottom of the cave [-1122] and return to the surface, for a team with reasonable training takes 15 to 30 hours without sleep or long stops. Add to this that it takes 1 hour to walk to the cave from "la Molière" and double that time to walk back.

The table below gives an indication of the rates of progress in the cave, when rigged. This provides a useful reference to gauge your own rate of progress.

From	To	Time	Accumulated time
Entrance	-250	1H	1H
-250	-500	1H30	2H30
-500	-860	3H	5H30
-860	-1122	2H30	8H
-1122	-860	3H45	11H45
-860	-500	4H	15H45
-500	-250	2H35	18H20
-250	Exit	2H40	21H

If you take longer than these times it's not a disgrace to turn around and come out, before you become exhausted.

It is helpful to limit the number of teams in the cave at the same time so they do not slow each others progress rate, which increases the total time underground.

Cave litter and cleaning up

Always bring out MORE rubbish that you create. In this way the cave will become cleaner. Do not bury rubbish. At the end of an expedition it helps to have a small team who's sole objective is the removal of rubbish.

Overrun of the permit

In case it becomes impossible to de-rig the cave, in particular in the case of bad weather. **Collaborate with the following team.** No one can leave equipment in the cave and refuse

others to use it.