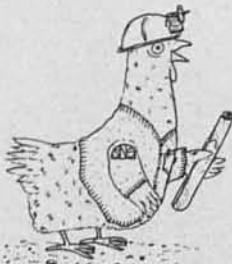


The Little Red Caving Hen

(An adaptation
of an old story)

By Mike Futrell, Illustrations by Author



Once upon a time a Little Red Caving Hen lived in a small cottage in a quiet valley. She devoted a lot of time to cave exploration and speleological research. At night she dreamed of big caves.

One day she was talking with her friends, the Goose, the Cat, the Pig, and the Groundhog. "Who will help me research the karst literature and locate a promising new caving area?" she asked her friends, the Goose, the Cat, the Pig, and the Groundhog.

"Not I," said the Goose. "I have a date."

"Not I," said the Cat. "I'd miss my TV show."

"Not I," said the Pig. "I'd rather drink beer."

"I will," said the Groundhog.

"Then Mr. Groundhog and I will do it ourselves," said the Little Red Caving Hen. And they did.

All week long the Little Red Caving Hen and the Groundhog studied and researched. By the next weekend the Little Red Caving Hen had decided on an area and gathered her topos. She called to her friends, the Goose, the Cat, the Pig, and the Groundhog, "Who will help me meet the landowners? We'll get permission to look for the Big Cave. I just know it's there."

"Not I," said the Goose. "There are no caves on that mountain."

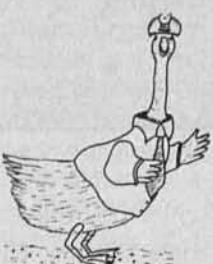
"Not I," said the Cat. "I don't like to walk."

"Not I," said the Pig. "I'm too drunk to farm to talkers."

"I will," said the Groundhog.

"Then Mr. Groundhog and I will do it ourselves," said the Little Red Caving Hen. And they did.

The Little Red Caving Hen and Mr. Groundhog met many nice farmers. One family in a big white house with a big porch on the front fed them a wonderful pumpkin pie.



The Little Red Caving Hen came back the following weekend to her friends, the Goose, the Cat, the Pig, and the Groundhog. "We have permission to ridgewalk on seven different farms," she said. "Who will help me?"

"Not I," said the Goose, "but call me if you find something good."

"Not I," said the Cat. "I don't like to ridgewalk."

"What? And miss a party?" said the Pig. "No, not I."

"I will," said the Groundhog.

"Then Mr. Groundhog and I will do it ourselves," said the Little Red Caving Hen. And they did.

The Little Red Caving Hen and Mr. Groundhog walked up the mountain and down the mountain, up and down, back and forth. By the end of the day, they were very tired and had worn holes in their boots.

"What do you think of this hole?" asked the Little Red Caving Hen.

"Looks like it would be a fine place to live, if it weren't so drafty," answered the Groundhog.

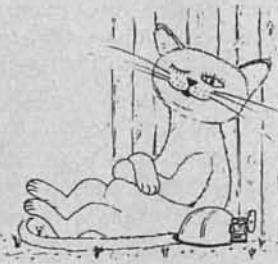
The next weekend the Little Red Caving Hen went to see her friends, the Goose, the Cat, the Pig, and the Groundhog. "We have found a good blow hole," she said, "but it will require some work to get in. Who will help me dig this cave open?" she asked her friends, the Goose, the Cat, the Pig, and the Groundhog.

"Not I," said the Goose. "I just cleaned my gear and don't want to get it dirty."

"Not I," said the Cat. "I don't like to dig."

"Not I," said the Pig. "I'm too hung over."

"I will," said the Groundhog.



"Very well, then," said the Little Red Caving Hen. "Mr. Groundhog and I will do it ourselves." And they did.

By the end of the day the Little Red Caving Hen and Mr. Groundhog had moved a very large mound of dirt and rocks. They were very tired but felt exuberant because they had discovered a very big cave.

The next weekend the Little Red Caving Hen told her friends the story of their digging and discovery. As she talked, caving animals from all the farms around came to hear her rock-by-rock account of The Great Dig. Then she jokingly asked, "Who will help me survey the booty?"

"I will," said the Goose. "I've always wanted to cave with you."

"I will," said the Cat. "but I don't really like to survey. I'd be glad to scoop ahead and let you know what happens."

"I will," said the Pig. "I bought you a beer once; therefore, you should let me come."

"I will," said the Dog. "I'm in your grotto and am committed to help you."

"I will," said the Cow. "I grazed on that farm once. I could be your lead tape."

"I will," said the Horse, "or we will find out where your cave is and go anyway!"

"Forget you all!" said the Little Red Caving Hen. "Mr. Groundhog and I spent hours researching to find the area. We worked on landowner relations and got permission. We did the ridgewalking and found the cave. We busted our backs digging it open. And now WE are going to survey the booty by ourselves." And they did.

Safety and Techniques

Vertical Etiquette (or, Miss Manners Says...)

By Phil Kirshtein and Angela Morgan

We have had several requests for a general beginners' article on vertical technique. No article can be a substitute for learning procedures in a simulated environment. Hands-on training and practice are essential. The following article does not attempt to teach vertical procedures, but contains a number of reminders—points to ponder as you learn the ropes.

Kirshtein and Morgan's article, which has appeared in grotto newsletters, contains valuable advice for beginners as well as us experienced cavers, who need to correct our bad habits.

The caving community is not in total agreement on anything, especially vertical work. With this in mind, I gathered a panel of experienced cavers to review the article and add their comments. Everyone agreed that it was a pretty good piece, and included many topics that vertical cavers should be taught, but often are not. To avoid the risk of confusing beginners and gunking up a nice general article, the reviewers' comments, in italics, remain separate from the authors' work. The authors have generously permitted us to reprint their original article, annotated with our comments.

The reviewers were John Ganter, Keith Goggin, Matt Oliphant, Nancy Pistole, Ron Simmons, and me.

—William Storage

Vertical caving is one of the more physically demanding and rewarding aspects of underground sport. However, if approached in a haphazard or inconsiderate way, vertical rope work can become the most dangerous sport on earth. After a recent training exercise and discussions of what could have been done better, the authors realized that the subject of vertical etiquette is basically untouched in caving literature.

We have compiled the following list of "vertical manners" as an introduction for neophyte vertical cavers with the high hopes of making pits everywhere safer places to be. We don't claim that it's comprehensive, nor do we think every experienced vertical caver down there will agree with every point we make. We are open for all comments and suggestions.

Just A Few Words About Rigging...

- Gardening the lip: clean loose dirt, rocks, etc. off the lip before rigging. Try to avoid rigging in poison ivy.
- Lower the rope into the pit; do not throw it. Before lowering the rope, always tie a figure-8 knot in the end, making a loop large enough to stand in. This will come in handy if the drop has been short-rigged: it will keep you from rappelling off the end of the rope, and give you somewhere to stand to facilitate changeover.
- If you don't like the rigging, say something about it!
- Never fiddle with the rigging anytime between an "on rope" and an "off rope" call. If you see something that needs to be done to the rigging, check with others present before doing it.
- Never lower a rope into a pit while someone is on another rope. If you want to rig another rope, check with those at the bottom and the top of the drop before lowering it. Whenever possible, it is best to rig all ropes before anyone descends.
- Put on your descending gear before beginning to rig the rope. This way, you will be able to clip a safety into the rope while placing rope pads, lowering the rope into the pit, etc. It is all too easy to ignore this important safety point and take chances, all because you didn't want to stop what you were doing and put on your seat harness.

KG: An ascender attached to the seat harness should always be used when close enough to the rope to clip in. This simple practice is ignored by too many cavers—even those who should know better.

Take Care o' Those Nylons!

A rope owner is very particular about his rope, and rightfully so! If a rope owner gets angry at you about something you've done to his rope, don't take it personally. Most importantly, his life (and everyone else's) depends on it; also, rope is not cheap. Following are some guidelines for taking care of the rope (whether it's yours or someone else's), and keeping the owner happy. (A disgruntled rope owner may not let you use his rope again.)

- Do not step on the rope.

NP: While this is, of course, good general advice, it reminds me that our priorities for rope care are a bit out of whack. For wear concerns, stepping on the rope is insignificant compared to rigging style, or lack of it.

- Do not allow the rope to be unnecessarily dragged through mud or dirt.
- Do not let any corrosive materials get near the rope. If you have a lead-acid battery with open vent holes, tape them shut! Keep batteries away from the rope in general.

KG: Sheet metal screws in your Wheat lamp battery do wonders for keeping the acid on the inside of the battery. WS: Using screws in the battery requires a lot of discipline. Failure to remove them during charging will have explosive consequences. Nevertheless, many people use the technique successfully. Others wrap the vent holes with duct tape for caving.

- Extra care must be observed when using a carbide lamp on rope. Keep the flame well away from the rope. Obviously, the nylon rope will melt quickly. (Some insist that carbide lamps should not be used on rope; however, since the authors are both diehard carbide cavers who have never burned a rope, we cannot support this view. Flame on!)
- When crossing a rope pad (either rappelling or climbing), make sure it is positioned properly and the rope is lying on the pad after you pass.

KG: This is especially true for mid-pitch rope pads. I have climbed up to mid-rope pads to find the rope rubbing on the rock instead, even after the climber took care to place the rope properly. If a rope pad is needed in mid-pitch, it should be the type that Ron Simmons makes, with full-length velcro so the pad always covers the rope. It is unfortunate that the majority of U.S. cavers are so unfamiliar with belay techniques; many places where people use rope-pads should really be rigged with belays. WS: Petzl Raven Products, Mike Artz (State of the Artz Mountaineering) and Joe Ivy (Gonzo Guano Gear) also make good rope protectors. Keith has a good point about belays.

- Always be alert to spots where the rope may be abrading and a pad is needed. If you see such a problem, it is your responsibility to correct it, or call it to someone else's attention.

KG, JG: Any rope user can temporarily solve the problem by tying a knot (figure 8, butterfly, etc.) to shorten the rope and take the bad spot out of the load path.

- Never toss anything (especially rocks) down a pit while a rope is in the pit. The object could strike the rope and cut or damage it.



Mike Wiles in
Jewel Cave,
South Dakota
Drawing by
Linda Heslop.

- Figure 8's are not accepted by some people as allowable rappelling devices on their ropes because they impart a twist in the rope. You should respect the rope owner's feelings on this matter.

- Some rope owners don't like alloy bars being used on their ropes because they leave (a lot of) aluminum oxide (a well-known abrasive substance) on the rope. Offering to wash this person's rope every once in a while might make him a bit more amenable. In any case, you should certainly respect the rope owner's wishes.

WS: These are manners and etiquette concerns, as of course the authors stated. While we have a long way to go before anyone will say caving manners are in surplus, it's probably good to point out that these concerns have nothing to do with safety. In fact, after first using those dirty aluminum bars, you may be in for a shiny surprise with the slippery steel ones.

- Most rope owners prefer not to lend out their ropes.

- Care of the rope is always your responsibility!

Can We Talk? (Vertical Communication)

Good communication is imperative to the success and safety of any caving trip. There are many different signals and protocols that are used in vertical caving. Any group of vertical cavers should agree upon the protocol to be used before beginning to descend the pit, to avoid confusion. Following is a protocol that is recommended by the authors. It differs somewhat from other, more widely-used protocols, for safety reasons.

- When approaching the rope to rig in for rappel, call "on rope." Don't wait until you have rigged in! When you are ready to rappel, call "rappelling."

- When rappelling, do not call "off rope" until you are derigged from the rope, are out of the fall zone, and are ready for the next person to proceed.

- When preparing to climb, call "on rope" before entering the fall zone. When you have rigged into the rope and are ready to climb, call "climbing."

RS: I'm not sure that the redundant calls ("on rope" and "climbing") are needed. Why do you need the second warning? This would really complicate whistle signals, which I think are important. You can't always hear voices well in a pit, especially with water. Also, I don't know of any standard whistle signals. MO: I agree, the more signals you have (on rope, rappeling, etc.) the more chance you have for a misunderstanding. WS: I wonder about the use of both "on rope" and "off rope." They sound alike. At the turn of the century, the Navy switched "larboard" to "port" so it wouldn't sound like "starboard." "On rappel" tells those below that someone is descending. We really should establish a standardized whistle code.

- When climbing, do not call "off rope" until you are derigged from the rope, have checked the rope pads, are safely away from the lip (i.e., when there is no danger of your knocking rocks, etc. down the pit) and are ready for the next person to proceed.

- "OK," may be used as an acknowledgement to any of the signals. "Repeat" may be used to request that the last signal be

repeated. "Stop" has an obvious meaning . . .

- When shouting up or down a drop, allow echo time between each syllable, more or less depending upon the depth of the drop.

- If you drop or knock anything down the pit, immediately call "Rock rock rock!" (three times in rapid succession). Use the word "rock" no matter what is falling. The courteous caver will call "rock" even if it is his body that is falling down the pit.

MO: If you try yelling "rock, rock, rock" quickly, you can't yell very loudly. One good solid bellow with full lungs will be heard a lot better. NP: Three of anything in succession generally means "help" as opposed to a warning to take cover.

- If you hear someone above you call "rock," don't look up!

- While waiting, listen carefully for signals from above or below. It is best to keep the noise level at a minimum, because otherwise, important signals may be missed.

What goes down must (usually) come up... and hopefully in the same condition as it went down. This includes people and ropes, but not rocks! Rocks don't come up (and you don't want them to go down in the first place). Some tips on getting the rope and everyone down and up the pit safely.

- When rappelling or climbing, double-check all your gear before beginning. If you are at all unsure about it, don't be embarrassed to ask someone else to check it for you.

- The first person down the pit should take responsibility for doing a little "house-keeping." Take the excess rope, untie the loop in the end (you did tie a loop in the end, didn't you?), and pile it neatly (with the loose end down) in a spot out of the fall zone, if possible. This keeps other rappellers from stepping on the rope, keeps falling objects from hitting the loose rope, and prepares for pulling the rope up by ensuring that it is not tangled. (A tangled rope is likely to snag on the way up.)

- The first person down a pit should know how to do a changeover, and should be prepared to do such, in case the drop was shortrigged or adverse conditions exist. (Ideally, of course, everyone should know how to do a changeover.)

Every reviewer independently stated that everyone on rope in a cave should be able to do a changeover. Most also added that the ability to cross a knot was essential. In discussing this with the authors, they agreed and stated that they were addressing very basic training maneuvers. Our recommendation is that changeover and knot-crossing skills be acquired on the surface before doing vertical work in caves.—WS

- The last person to ascend the pit should doublecheck that the loop has been untied, and ensure that the excess rope is positioned such that it will not snag or become tangled while it is being pulled up.

- Climbing tandem is not as cumbersome as some people make it out to be; in fact, some people prefer it because they can bounce the pit more times. (It also gives the climbers some company and moral support on long drops.) The top tandem climber may request for the lower climber to stop climbing while negotiating the lip.

RS: Tandem climbing requires special preparation. The top climber must be able to get off rope with the load of another climber below.

- Traditionally, the order of ascending the pit is the same as the order of descending it. Of course, the ascending order is often changed for various reasons, but it is courteous to follow this guideline if there has been no discussion of a change.

- Don't be embarrassed to ask for a belay if you want one. If someone is prepared to belay but you don't want one, don't argue about it. A little extra safety never hurt anybody.

RS: I assume they're talking about a bottom belay, which I consider to be very dangerous, at least for the belayer. They usually end up in the rock fall zone without realizing it. If a bottom belay is really needed, the belayer must find a way to stay clear of falling rocks. One way may be to tie a carabiner to a boulder and run the standing rope through it, then well beneath an overhang, where tension could be applied. WS: In general, a top belay is a bad idea, too. How many times have we heard about tangled ropes in wet drops, with subsequent hypothermia? In the case of very basic practice sessions for beginners, a top belay could be used without problems. This is customary for rappel training. Considering how caves, even "easy ones," tend to somehow complicate simple problems though, it seems reasonable to recommend that rappel skills be developed on cliffs until the rappeler is comfortable without a top belay.

- When waiting at the top of the pit, be sure that you don't knock anything down the pit (stay well away from the lip).

- When waiting at the bottom of the pit, stay well out of the fall zone, unless you enjoy being hit by falling rocks, packs, etc.

- When rappelling or climbing, have everything (packs, etc.) securely attached to your body. Do not detach items from yourself unless absolutely necessary; if you do find this necessary, use extreme care not to drop anything! Of course, you know what to call if you should happen to drop something....

Faye Heslop rappelling into Purple Balloon Cave, Pryor Mountains of Montana. From a pencil drawing by Linda Heslop.



LINDA HESLOP

- When rappelling, always have full ascending gear with you. When climbing, always have a rappel device with you. You never know when you may have to switch from one to the other.

JG: "With you" means where you can get to it quickly and attach it to yourself and the rope. It is harder than it looks, until you've practiced a few times. A cowtail can be used to avoid dropping the descender down the pit.

It's 2 A.M. Do You Know Where Your Rope Is?

At some locations a rope guard is a necessity at the top of the pit. During a recent night trip to Natural Well (Huntsville, Alabama), at 12:30 a.m. three unsavory individuals appeared. Just because it's late at night doesn't mean a rope guard is unnecessary!

- Having or not having a rope guard is usually a judgment call. When in doubt, leave one.

- Reasons for having a rope guard include avoiding stolen, cut or damaged rope and other (possibly not vertically competent) individuals trying to use your rope. The rope guard also serves as a pit guard, to keep passersby from doing nasty things such as throwing rocks and beach balls into the pit. Should rope guards be armed? That's up to you and the rope guard....

- Tying the rope to a rock at the bottom if no rope guard is available is considered by

some as an alternative. This keeps your rope from being stolen and gives you something to look at while you're sitting around at the bottom of the pit waiting for your callout time to pass. (You did tell someone where you were going and when you would be back, didn't you?)

We All Have Vices...

- Caving "under the influence" is frowned on by a majority of organized cavers who view such activity as an accident waiting to happen. If you must imbibe, wait until afterwards when you won't endanger yourself or your companions.

- Sex on rope should be attempted only while climbing with a safety (thus giving five points of contact). You do practice safe sex, don't you? It can be tricky on rope.... Good luck!

Okay! So we just threw a "hole" bunch of high (low) sounding rules at you. Really it all comes down to consideration, thinking about what you're doing before you do it and common sense.

Keep on bouncing those pits!

Please note that the Safety and Techniques Editor has moved once again. Correspondence should be addressed to William Storage, 2 Bayside Village Place, Apt. 421, San Francisco, CA 94107, (415) 512-1886.