

Caving 101

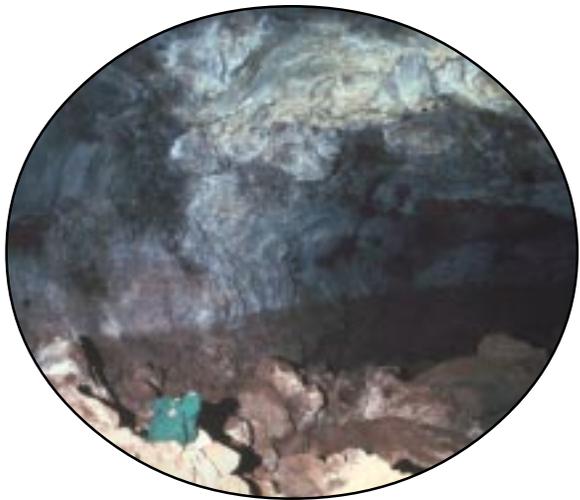
What You Need To Know Before Caving at El Malpais



Which caves may I explore?

You may go into **Junction Cave**, **Big Skylight Cave**, and **Four-Windows Cave** year round without a permit. **Braided Cave** is closed to all visitors between May and September every year to protect a colony of Townsend's big eared bats.

Entry into any other cave requires a permit that must be obtained prior to your trip.



Do I need special equipment?

To safely explore the caves at El Malpais, you need **flashlights**, a **hard hat**, **warm clothing**, and **hiking boots**. To protect your hands against sharp rocks, **leather gloves** are also useful. Although crawling is minimal in most areas of the caves, some people also use **knee pads**.

Ropes and other technical equipment are not necessary. If you want to do a technical entry into a cave, you need a permit that must be obtained prior to your trip.



What are the caves like inside?

The lava tube caves at El Malpais are **dark**, **cold**, and **rugged**. They are wild caves, meaning there are no established trails or lights. Although they vary in length, most are 1000 feet long, or more.

You will be in complete darkness once you go beyond the entrance zone of the cave and the footing through much of the cave is loose and rocky. However, if you are willing to explore in these conditions, you will be treated to a true adventure. Seeing moss gardens, searching for lava and mineral formations, and experiencing total darkness are your rewards for leaving the surface of the lava flow.