
FAROU GROTTO

Members Handbook

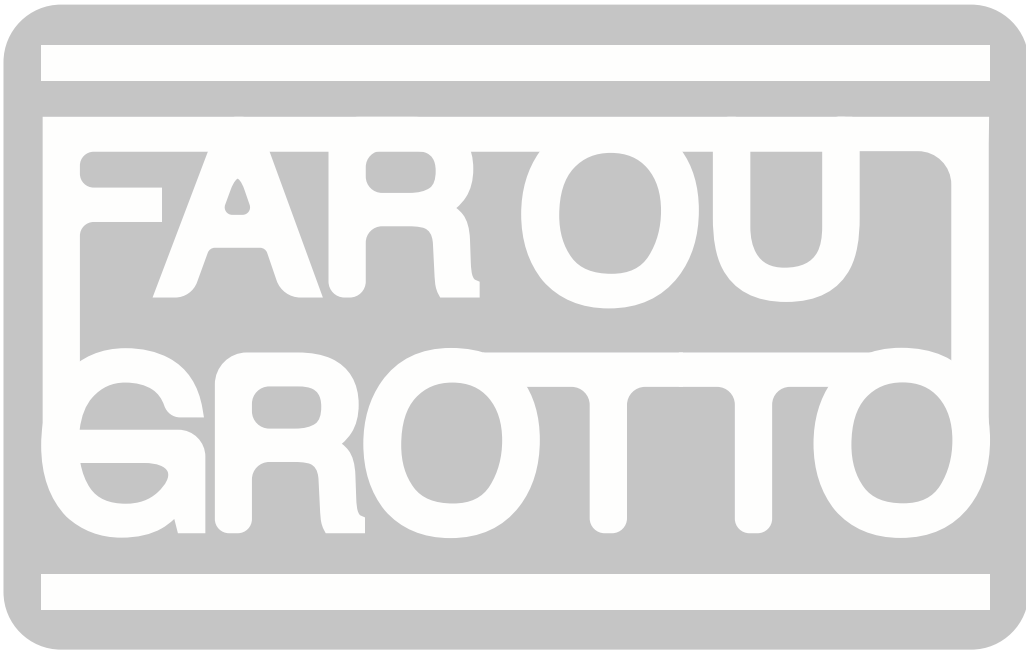


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Audentes fortuna adiuvat

Fortune favours the brave

Section 1



Introduction

The brain child of a group of caving buddies, Far Out Grotto was established in 2026 as a virtual caving club to bring together cavers from Aotearoa and beyond. It began its humble beginnings as a group of friends in far flung corners of New Zealand wanting a collective to stay connected while being able to share ideas and events easily.

The goal was simple, be a place for everyone with a passion for our underground wonders, young and old alike.

Safety is at the forefront of everything we do. The underground can be an unforgiving place and accidents can happen to the most experienced of practitioners hence why we strive to uphold a formalised training program for potential group leaders with strict ratios for newcomer trips. This includes pre trip planning by the leaders and pre trip briefings to ensure that new members and first time participants feel informed and safe throughout. We also have a see something, say something policy to ensure we are all accountable for our safety when underground. In saying this, it is also our aim to safely allow people to push their limits, experience challenges and discomfort in a controlled way to push one's own boundaries should they wish to be it the first solo descent on a large pitch or conquering that tricky squeeze.

Caving is a team sport and we want everyone to have fun exploring New Zealand's subterranean wonderland and expanding the known limits while making lifelong friends in the process.

The NZSS

FOG is an affiliated member of the NZSS (New Zealand Speleological Society). All FOG members have NZSS membership and as such have access to the benefits which come with the NZSS. The NZSS is the national body for caving in New Zealand acting as a voice for the caving community on the national stage. They negotiate with landowners to ensure healthy relations between cavers and landowners, they manage the national cave rescue response service and ensure the conservation of our karst environments. They also release a quarterly newsletter detailing the adventures and discoveries of cavers all over the country.

As well as the benefits, it is also expected that members adhere to both the FOG code of conduct and the NZSS code of conduct.



A person wearing a headlamp and a backpack is standing in a cave, holding a camera. The cave is filled with stalactites and stalagmites, and the lighting is warm and focused on the person and the rock formations.

Mission Statement

Far Out Grotto Mission Statement:

- Foster the spirit of adventure
- Promote safe caving practices
- Promote education in cave conservation
- Develop leadership and team building amongst members
- Strengthen relations with Iwi and land owners

FOG seeks to be a unifying group with an emphasis on developing evidence based safe practice and inclusion. Our strength lies in the innovative ideas brought to the fore by the members. Empowering our members to challenge and evolve the club holds the key to wider engagement and a healthy exploratory attitude within the activity. FOG endeavours to adapt and implement evidence based best practice using findings from the international community as well as home grown innovations.

Structure

Far Out Grotto is managed by the council. The minimum roles the council requires are:

President
Secretary
Treasurer

These are elected members of the group trusted with representing the grotto and its interests and ensuring the grotto is run in accordance with relevant legislation to the best of their abilities.

President:

The president's role is to represent the interests of the grotto by making decisions ensuring these keep in line with legislation and policy. The president will act with impartiality and make decisions to the best of their capabilities to ensure the needs of the grotto are met.

The president will act as a representative to partner agencies and will act accordingly. Although some decisions may need to be made without consultation, all actions taken by the president must be made with the grotto's best interest at the forefront.

A president must have good interpersonal skills, be willing to listen, be able to make difficult decisions and communicate. They must be transparent in their role and must set a good example to the community they serve. It is a privilege and not a right to serve as president.

Secretary:

The secretary role is a primary point of contact for the grotto and maintains the day to day operation of the society. They will record and distribute minutes from council meetings, AGM meetings and distribute material on behalf of the council. The secretary bridges the bond between the council and its members by ensuring queries and correspondence is directed to the correct person. Secretaries are often computer literate, good listeners and have the ability to accurately record information.

Treasurer:

Probably one of the most important roles, the treasurer maintains the financial health of the club and ensures that the accounts are accurately maintained and recorded. The treasurer will be in charge of putting together annual reports for the members and ensuring full transparency of income and spending to its members.

Other roles:

Training officer:

A training officer is one who plans and implements training throughout the year and updates member records to ensure the society has accurate records of the level of each member. The training officer will also ensure that any updates from the national or international community gets updated and disseminated to members.

Health and safety officer:

Another key role, the health and safety officer's role is to ensure that any safety notices be it about equipment, access, issues in caves and such are disseminated to members and publicised so members are kept up to date and made aware of risks they may encounter.

Media officer:

With several platforms online to manage, the media officer role maintains social media and ensures that members are kept up to date with activities, events and news from the community. This includes collecting trip reports, accepting reports of discoveries made by members and other such material.

Membership officer:

Membership officer works closely with the treasurer and training officer to ensure that our members are supported. As membership officer, they maintain the members list, chase up dues among many other duties.

The council is vital for the running of the society and is always open to new members willing to learn and take on an active role in the council and even though the council are the official figures, assistance from willing members is always appreciated and encouraged. The roles described here are very loose descriptions so duties may exceed what is described here.

Membership options

All memberships cover an annual membership. The membership starts in line with our financial year of the 1st September in line with the NZSS and discounts can be given for first time members joining half way into the year.

Individual:

Cost:

Individual membership covers a single member and gives full access to the FOG community, educational material, cave information and workshops. As well as FOG membership, it also covers NZSS membership which includes a bi-annual news letter, ability to join NZSS expeditions and events, publications, access to club events and free access to the Waitomo museum of caves.

Family:

Cost

Covers two adults and two children under 18 who reside in the same residential address. Ideal for families with children wanting to engage with the sport. Gives all the perks of an individual membership and NZSS membership for a slight increase in cost compared to an individual.

Student:

Cost:

We've been there, you've started university, your living off baked beans and instant noodles and don't have a dollar to your name. We know it's tough so we have a discounted rate for students. All you need to do is just send us proof you're a student with a student card displaying your name and an expiration date.

Youth:

Cost:

This is for young cavers aged 5-17 years old. We understand this may just be your hobby and not something your parents may be interested in and so rather than investing in a family membership we offer a youth membership with parental consent.

Non caver:

Cost:

Maybe you're not a caver and just want to meet some cool people? Cavers tend to also partake in a number of other outdoor activities and have a wide range of interests so if you want to just help the club out and be part of an exciting community doing some awesome stuff then this could be the membership for you.



Section 2



Member progression

Novice - Fully competent Horizontal only - Fully competent - Group leader

Novice:

A novice is classed as anyone new to the sport who needs a bit of guidance to learn how to navigate and thrive in their new environment. Novices will be welcome on horizontal trips posing low risk obstacles while they learn. This does not mean that the trips won't be sporting though, horizontal caves can be some of the most exciting. While the novice builds their confidence, when they feel ready they can start learning the art of SRT (Single Rope Techniques) and progress to the level of full competence.

Fully competent - Horizontal only:

A fully competent caver is a caver with some experience in caving with the skills to be self-sufficient. This can be broken into two categories, fully competent no SRT and fully competent. A person can be very capable of managing a more complex horizontal cave without SRT knowledge but this does mean that they will not be able to partake in SRT trips until that competency is gained but the journey is very much individual. Those who have no interest in ropes do not have to become SRT competent if they do not wish to.

Fully competent:

Full competence is a caver who has demonstrated proficiency in horizontal caves and has passed an SRT assessment to ensure self-reliance in that aspect of caving. A fully competent member will need to be honest with their own skills to gauge their participation on trips from intermediate to advanced. As an example it is probably not wise to jump straight onto a 4-day Bulmer trip with complex rigging if you have only just passed your SRT assessment but this is an entirely personal assessment. A fully competent member can form peer trips and take part in trips they feel are within their capabilities. They can also assist with seconding novice trips at the group leader's discretion. While acting as a second your role will be to assist the group leader in maintaining safety of the group and being capable to assist in emergencies.

Group leader:

Group leader is a more formal role. This role places the practitioner in a position where expertise is expected and the safety of the group falls on you. Group leaders must be fully competent either with or without SRT and must have a full working knowledge of group management, setting and initiating call outs, weather effects on systems, risk assessing a system and how to engage with landowners. FOG will provide training and workshops to assist members who want to become group leaders.



A large, textured cave wall with a caver at the bottom. The cave wall is composed of various rock formations, including stalactites and stalagmites, in shades of brown and tan. A caver wearing a white helmet, a blue long-sleeved shirt, and an orange backpack is standing on a rocky ledge at the bottom of the frame, looking up at the cave wall.

Training

Training will be delivered in a format of local workshops and online seminars. With a defined training pathway, new members will be able to identify skills they wish to progress while also having a solid basis to begin caving with. The syllabus will be formed using the NZOIA qualification as well as syllabuses used by the British Caving Association and National Speleological Society.

Our training system:

FOG has developed an inhouse training and progression system to ensure that our members are safe and proficient in practices used nationally and internationally. We break our members down into categories to identify where they are in their caving journey. This helps to inform what trips are suitable for each member and gives a clear progression for members to build their skills. Experience is also a key factor, knowing how to manage situations through lived experience is essential and so there is no time limit for progression. A person with a year in the sport caving once a month in different systems can have as much working knowledge and experience as a caver with 5 years having only caved once in a while in the same system. Progression is about what the participant feels is right for them.

Formal training:

Like many other sports, caving does require training, the development of skills and maintenance of them. The aim of our training system is to ensure that those new to the sport get the education they need to be safe and self-sufficient, it also ensures that there are a standardised set of skills allocated to each level to ensure that the right person is in the right cave in the right role. The member can choose how they engage with this system and what training they partake in and what level of caving they want to experience.

Skill expectations

Full member expectations - horizontal only:

Skill expectations:

Planning and preparation

- Can appropriately plan and prepare a trip at the appropriate level
- Understands the effects of weather on caves
- Knows what equipment is necessary for the trip both personal and group
- Sets a call out with an appropriate person prior to entering the system.

In the cave:

Can move through a cave carefully and considerately.

Understands conservation practices and observes these practices.

Is proficient at navigating a number of obstacles in the underground environment safely.

Can be self sufficient underground.

Full member expectations:

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- Can be self sufficient underground.

SRT skills:

Descent:

- Can approach an obstacle safely
- Can attach a descender to a line, move only line and perform pre-descent checks
- Can descend a line safely

Ascent:

- Can approach an obstacle safely
- Can attach ascending equipment to a line and prep for ascent.
- Can ascend a line safely

Re-belay

- Can approach the rebelay and make themselves safe to prepare to change lines.
- Can move off one line and onto next safely.
- Can perform pre-descent and pre-ascent checks.
- Can descend or ascend a line safely

Re-direct

- Can approach the redirection in a controlled way and appropriately position.
- Can disconnect the redirect and reconnect correctly.
- Can continue travel on the line safely

Mid rope change over descent to ascent:

- Can lock off descender correctly.
- Can connect a chest and hand ascender to the line and safety check.
- Can disconnect descender and continue.

Mid rope change over ascent to descent:

- Can correctly prepare themselves for changeover.
- Can safely connect descender and lock off.
- Can perform a safe change over.

Traverse lines:

- Can safely navigate a traverse line using cows tails

Group leader skills:

A group leader must be competent in all aspects of personal proficiency before being able to take on the responsibility of the safety of others. These responsibilities should be shared with fully competent members assisting the trip.

Pre planning and preparation:

- Must be able to risk assess a system to assess suitability for group
- Understand the effects of weather on the system
- Be able to competently route find and navigate
- Identify personal and group equipment for trip
- Ensure there are the correct safety ratios of experienced to non experienced cavers
- Set an appropriate safety plan and call out
- Ensure a pre trip briefing to all participants detailing trip expectations, duration and any emergency measures
- Check all group equipment to ensure participants are correctly equipped

In the cave:

- Ensure the group stays together
- Monitor overall group health for signs of fatigue or cold stress developing
- Manage and coach participants through obstacles ensuring the rest of the group is in a safe position
- Be able to use handlines to manage height hazards
- Be capable of managing emergencies



Education

There is much to learn within the caving space. We want to empower cavers to develop their knowledge and FOG will provide a few avenues to its members to ensure they have access to resources which can expand one's knowledge.

Online resources:

FOG will maintain a collection of resources in an online drive which will be accessible to all members. These will cover a number of subjects from caving basics to rope techniques, rescue, conservation and more. These resources can be used to supplement training and also expose practitioners to international practices.

Online workshops:

FOG will host workshops online where members can do presentations to their peers to pass on knowledge. Workshops can be about anything caving related, for example photography, surveying, geology, expeditions, the list goes on and this can be member driven.

In person workshops:

FOG will provide training opportunities to its members. This could be a one day course to a weekend course. A list of courses will be publicised to members via email and posted to social media.

Duke of Edinburgh:

Something FOG is excited to assist its members with the accomplishment of the Duke of Edinburgh award at all levels. Caving can fulfil a number sections within the scheme. Members who want to use caving will be fully supported by FOG however we can.

Leadership and development:

Developing personal and leadership skills in club members is a pivotal part of FOG's mission. This development empowers members to reach a level of personal competency within the caves of New Zealand before building a strong group of leaders with a good foundation in group management and safety. This will be achieved through the provision of resources in a digital format, online and in person workshops and courses which will be formed in line with NZOIA qualifications. With a clear progression line, members will be confident in their skill levels and will be able to have goals to work towards should this be a desired pathway.

Grants and awards

FOG is dedicated to providing opportunities to cavers with the aim of furthering exploration, education and research. It is our intent to establish a grant which can be applied for to assist with members who wish to take part or organise expeditions or research missions. A proposal should be submitted to the council and FOG members will be able to vote on the cause deemed to be the most beneficial. Names and identifying factors will be sanitised so the proposal will be judged on merit of the proposal to try and keep it as fair as possible. Finances available, submission dates for proposals and voting dates will be given to members as soon as possible. Depending on finances, there may be opportunities to spread the grant across multiple projects.

Categories for grants:

Expeditions:

Expeditions are exciting and a great way to meet cavers and learn new things. These can be either here in New Zealand or abroad as an expedition organiser or participant. Members can apply for funding to assist with the financial costs associated with expeditions. Now we can't promise we will be able to assist everyone and it may not be a significant amount but if there is a way FOG can help people pursue their ambitions then we will try. If we can assist in making expeditions more accessible then we want to help. The expedition must have a purpose such as pushing a known system, surveying new systems and so on and successful grant applicants must provide the club with a trip report, be willing to present their experience at an online workshop and allow for publication by FOG.

Research:

The karst environment is always yielding new and exciting discoveries and we understand that conducting research does incur costs. Like with expeditions, we understand that research is an important way of expanding our known world. Grants for research may be granted providing that the research is related to the study of karst, biodiversity, hydrology or geology in relation to caves. Research must have an endorsement from a reputable source and be carried out with the intention of publication of findings in a peer reviewed journal.

Technology development:

Got an idea for some tech to develop? The development of technology in caving is a valuable field. It could help develop our rescue response, open up new ways to map and survey our caves, the possibilities are endless. Funding can be made available to help with getting those last finishing touches on that home project which could revolutionise caving as we know it. Providing the development is for a caving purpose, consideration can be given to allocating funds to development projects

A photograph of a caver in a cave. The caver is wearing a white helmet with a headlamp and a green t-shirt. They are holding a handheld electronic device, possibly a GPS or a data logger, and looking at the screen. The cave walls are made of rough, light-colored rock. The lighting is dim, with the headlamp providing the main source of light.

As FOG grows, the pot of money for grants will grow as well. We will be open and transparent in reporting the amount of funds available, grants that are issued and will publish at the start of the financial year the time frame for applications. Members will be able to review and vote for what gets funded but the council will dictate the amount allocated. This process is of course in its infancy and so may be subject to change but any changes will be communicated to its members.

Section 3



Code of conduct

The Far Out Grotto Council will always:

- Do its best to act in the interests of its members
- Give a fair hearing to new ideas and innovations from its members
- Ensure the safety and security of all its members
- Investigate fully and impartially any complaints from its members
- Ensure that members are given the tools and resources they need to be safe
- Help improve safety and conservation through evidence based practices in line with the NZSS
- Do its best to facilitate training, workshops, group trips
- Will support members to the best of their ability

It will not:

- Knowingly place members in harms way
- Act without consent of the majority of its members
- Be hostile towards members interests

Members will always:

- Adhere to the code of conduct outlined in the Far Out Grotto handbook and the code of conduct outlined in the NZSS constitution and handbook.
- Will always be courteous and respectful. This includes to landowners, lwi, partner agencies, other cavers and members of the public
- Will always ensure that landowner and lwi access instructions are strictly followed
- Cave within the individuals limits and to the best of their abilities not place others in dangerous situations.
- Always cave with conservation in mind. This includes but is not limited to the limiting of numbers on group trips, being mindful of rigging and ensuring the conduct of other cavers is not inadvertently harming the cave environment i.e touching formations, crossing conservation lines or causing willful damage.
- Respect the rights and dignity of others no matter gender, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation or social status.

Members will not:

- Conduct themselves in such a way that the member knows or ought to have known that such conduct would bring disrepute to Far Out Grotto.
- Conduct themselves in such a way where the member knows or ought to have known that such conduct would put themselves or others at risk
- Cave in such a way that the member would know or ought to have known that damage is caused to the cave environment or any landowner property
- Act in such a way that is contrary to the rules set out in this handbook, NZSS constitution or NZSS handbook.



Club conduct

Novice groups:

Any one wishing to lead group trips must be competent with the skills set out by this handbook. Members will be able to obtain the status of a group leader having demonstrated the relevant competencies to a trained person. Novice cavers require a high level of supervision and as such ratios for novice trips must be 1-3 with experienced to novice cavers. The group leader assumes overall responsibility for the trip and must ensure that all due diligence has been carried out including but not limited to a risk assessment of the cave system, safety plan and call out registered with a competent person.

Peer groups:

A peer group trip can be led by anyone with the appropriate experience and skills. A peer group trip is an undertaking where all participants are of similar experience and have the competency and skills to safely engage in the activity without supervision. The group as a whole will be responsible for their safety and must ensure that a risk assessment is carried out, safety plan formed and call out registered with a competent person.

Vertical:

Any cave system requiring the implementation of independent SRT skills are not to be undertaken by anyone not competent in SRT. Any person wishing to take part in an SRT trip must be signed off as competent prior to going underground. When considering if a trip is an SRT trip, the group leader must consider the following:

Can I adequately supervise this person on a pitch?

Do I have the skills to perform a rescue should the person become stuck on the rope or cannot progress?

Does the cave require more advanced skills such as the ability to pass a re-belay or redirect?

Caves where handlines, low angle skills or short pitches no greater than 10m are navigated

Access:

Any caves on private property must have permission sought from the landowner or Iwi. The landowner or Iwi reserves the right to revoke access at any time and this must be honoured by all members regardless. Rules and conditions stipulated by landowners and Iwi's must be strictly followed at all times.

Landowner details will be disseminated in accordance with the landowners wishes and for more sensitive caves requiring an enhanced level of protection, details may be withheld by the council from the greater community but can be obtained through the access and information officer. Surveys and Descriptions of the caves will be available for all caves however locations and landowner details may be restricted in the case of protected systems. Members will be made aware of which systems this refers to. Restrictions will not apply to systems on DOC land unless there is a specification that permissions are needed from DOC.

Locations and details must not be distributed outside of FOG in line with NZSS policy.

Conduct inside the cave:

Cavers must implement a "leave no trace" policy. This means that maximum care must be given to not leave any trace of human presence following a trip. All rubbish must be removed including but not limited to food, containers and human waste.

Cavers must take great care when navigating areas of formations. Formations must not be touched or tampered with. Care must be taken not to dirty pristine formations with mud and conservation areas marked off by string or tape must be strictly adhered to.

Any bolting must be conducted adhering to NZSS policy. Where damaged bolts, rope or other tackle are identified this must be reported to the access and information officer to disseminate to the wider community via a bulletin. This can then also be shared with the NZSS and local caving clubs to address.

