

The Escabrosa Grotto, Inc. of the National Speleological Society

Onyx Cave Trip Leader Briefing Guide

1. **PURPOSE.** Escabrosa Grotto, Inc. (EGI) is dedicated to preserving and protecting the delicate natural ecosystem that is Onyx, while still allowing reasonable entry for recreation, exploration, and research. The information within this Briefing Guide has been extracted from a larger document entitled Policies and Procedures for the Protection and Management of the Onyx Cave Ecosystem. Any Trip Leader who will lead a trip into Onyx Cave **is required** to:
 - (1) read and be familiar with the larger Policies and Procedures document mentioned above, **and**
 - (2) read this Briefing Guide (beginning with this paragraph 1.) to his/her group **before** entering the cave.
2. **ONYX CAVE.** Onyx is a moderately large cave in Santa Cruz County, Arizona, with about two miles of total passage. It is primarily horizontal, but has some verticality with a number of pits up to 150 feet deep. At least minimal caving knowledge and climbing skills are required to safely travel through the cave.
3. **ASSUMPTION OF RISK.** EGI carries no liability insurance and will not assume responsibility for the safety of visitors entering Onyx – **thus it is the individual responsibility of every Onyx visitor to obtain adequate equipment and proper training before entering Onyx Cave.**
4. **PENALTIES.** Violations of any of the rules and policies EGI has established for Onyx Cave may result in forfeiture of future access privileges into Onyx Cave.
5. **TRIP LEADER.** The Trip Leader is the most important member of any group entering Onyx, and by agreeing to serve as Trip Leader, must also agree to accept the numerous responsibilities that come with the role. By signing the Onyx Cave Permit and accepting the Onyx gate key, the Trip Leader is attesting to possessing sufficient caving skill and knowledge to assure the safety of his/her group and the preservation of the cave. The Trip Leader shall be a participating member of the group entering the cave, and shall be held responsible for the actions of his/her group while the group is in Onyx. It is also required that members of the group follow the guidance and judgment of their respective Trip Leader while in Onyx Cave.
6. **EQUIPMENT.**
 - 6.1. **Lighting.** Everyone must have at least three approved (see management policy) sources of light on their person or in their cave pack.
 - 6.2. **Helmets.** Everyone is required to wear a protective helmet, with chin-strap, and with a mounted head light.
 - 6.3. **Cave Packs.** Every person entering Onyx will carry a hands-free cave pack (e.g., equipped with shoulder straps or attached to a belt around the waist) for water, snacks, pee bottle, and other supplies & equipment.
 - 6.4. **First Aid Kit.** Each Group entering Onyx is required to have at least one first aid kit.
 - 6.5. **Footwear.** EGI recommends the wearing of sturdy hiking/climbing boots with lug-pattern soles – tennis/sneaker-type street shoes are not recommended.
 - 6.6. **Gloves.** EGI requires wearing gloves to: (1) protect the hands from cuts, scratches, & rope abrasions, and (2) reduce the amount of skin oils left on cave surfaces (see 6.1.6. in policy).
 - 6.7. **Clothing.** Clothing worn in Onyx should be selected to minimize the shedding of lint, loose threads, etc. within the cave. Clothing with bangles, glitter, rhinestones, etc. is prohibited.
 - 6.8. **Ropes, Technical Rigging and Climbing Equipment/Hardware.** All rope and technical rigging will use only natural rigging points; the installation of new permanent anchors such as expansion bolts is prohibited, as are temporary anchors such as grappling hooks. To reduce scratches/damage to Onyx surfaces, visitors are prohibited from traveling through Onyx passages with climbing equipment/hardware (such as carabiners, racks, ascenders/descenders, etc.) attached to their harness or person. Personal climbing equipment/hardware will only be worn while actually in use.
 - 6.9. **White-nose Syndrome Protocols.** No equipment (e.g., helmet, light, pack and contents, ropes, climbing gear, clothing, boots) that has been used in a cave, mine, or bat roost outside of Arizona after 1 April 2005 may be used in Onyx. Equipment used only within 10 miles of Onyx need not be decontaminated; however, all gear and clothing should be clean before entering Onyx.

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7. TRAILS, TRAVEL, AND ACTIVITY RESTRICTIONS.

- 7.1. Onyx Cave Gate and Register.** The gate must be kept locked during the group's visit, and upon exiting the cave. The Trip Leader shall ensure safe keeping of the key while within Onyx. The Trip Leader must also ensure all trip members legibly sign the register upon entering the cave and sign out upon exiting.
- 7.2. Group Movement through the Cave.** A second group on the same day must wait at least one hour after the first before entering. Groups may not join up in the cave and travel together, or switch group members. Visitors are expected to limit their footsteps to the middle of the previously well-established trail and to remember that carelessly-placed footsteps can leave muddy bootprints on a delicate and pristine surface. Likewise, a muddy hand may leave an ugly blemish on a beautiful wall or formation. Visitors are expected to follow the concepts of: "CAVE SOFTLY" and "LEAVE NO TRACE". Any person who notices any apparently new damage or littering is asked to immediately contact EGI.
- 7.3. Trail Marking.** The use of string to mark the trail in Onyx is prohibited, and any other non-permanent method of trail marking (such as plastic flagging tape, reflectors, etc.) shall not damage or mark the cave and shall be completely removed as the group leaves the cave. The use of paint, chalk, or any other form of permanent sign or arrow to mark the trail in Onyx is prohibited.
- 7.4. Access Restrictions.** There may be areas within Onyx that EGI has deemed it necessary to restrict access. These areas may be marked-/cordoned-off by surveyor's tape, plastic cones, plastic cutlery, etc. and are not to be entered.
- 7.5. Meals/Eating.** To prevent mold, great care must be taken whenever food is consumed in Onyx. To prevent dropping crumbs, always eat over the opening of a large plastic bag or the opening of your cave pack. Do not eat "on the move" while traveling through Onyx.
- 7.6. Waste Disposal.** Littering is strictly prohibited; all visitors will carefully pack and remove their trash/litter from Onyx. The voiding of urine and/or solid waste into the Onyx environment is prohibited. Each person will carry a "pee bottle" and a sturdy container for solid waste for use in the cave. Waste must not come into contact with any surface in Onyx. Pack out all waste.
- 7.7. General Prohibitions.** The following activities/items are PROHIBITED while in Onyx Cave:
- Spitting of saliva or any other liquid.
 - Smoking (including electronic cigarettes) or use of any tobacco product (such as snuff & chewing tobacco).
 - Consumption or use of any alcoholic beverage or intoxicant, or any other form of illegal drug.
 - Use/release of any foreign chemical/scent (cosmetics, lotions, aerosols, insect repellents, sun block, etc.).
 - Glass bottles or containers.
 - The firing or discharge of any type of firearm or firework.
 - Camping or bivouacking within Onyx without prior EGI permission.
 - Wood fires within any part of Onyx, to include the entrance area.
 - Any digging or excavating in Onyx for any purpose without EGI's express written approval.
 - Pets or other animals.
 - The writing/marketing of words, names, arrows, or any other type of graffiti on any wall, ceiling or surface.
 - The creation of sculptures or figures out of mud, or any other marring of any mud surface.
 - The throwing of mud, mud balls, or any other kind of material within Onyx.
- 7.8. Photography.** By signing the Onyx Cave Permit, all visitors entering Onyx agree that photos taken in Onyx, and written descriptions and comments about photos, will not be published or distributed (hard copy, email, social media, etc.) with the Cave name or location attached. Remove location metadata (i.e. latitude/longitude) from photos before posting or distributing.
- 7.9. Wildlife.** The disturbance of any wildlife within Onyx, be it vertebrate/invertebrate/plant, is prohibited, is illegal under Arizona state law, and could result in fines and/or imprisonment. Visitors encountering bats should immediately become quiet, avoid shining lights on or near the bats, not approach any closer, and quickly leave the area. Photographing bats is prohibited unless prior EGI approval is obtained. If bats are encountered, the Trip Leader is requested to provide written details (date, location, description of observations, etc.) to EGI within one (1) week of the trip.
- 7.10. Emergencies.** Should any injury or emergency require outside assistance, **call 911** as soon as possible.