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Things to Know About Urban Exploration

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Introduction

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Human kind has always been a curious creature exploring all aspects of life from the physical spaces around them to the less tangible questions of how our world works. Given our rapid expansion, mapping of our planet and the vast amounts of knowledge we have at our disposal it may seem that this sense of exploration has no outlet within our society today, however that is not the case. There is a group of people who explore and document the current conditions or our past by finding and exploring long forgotten relics that used to house factories, hospitals of old, these people are called "urban explorers." Urban exploring is now solely limited to abandoned buildings, it encompasses exploring underground networks of tunnels or rooftops. The scope of exploring is really unlimited and has a slightly different meaning for each explorer. These explorers have existed as individuals or small concentrations around the world for as long as buildings have been left to decay. More recently though there has been a convergence of these explorers with the explosion of the social media sites that allow people to share stories, locations, photo-

graphs, videos and adventures with other explorers in ways that were never possible before. This new age of collaboration in this activity has sparked new explorers young and old alike to take up this hobby, this is a great step forward for this growing activity but there are certain precautions and rules that one needs to know before delving into these modern day ruins. This is a short guide to getting involved in urban exploration using the great resources that have become available via the internet. Human kind has always been a curious creature exploring all aspects of life from the physical spaces around them to the less tangible questions of how our world works. Given our rapid expansion and mapping of our planet and the vast amounts of knowledge we have at our disposal it may seem that this sense of exploration has no outlet within our society, however that is where you are wrong. There is a group of people who explore and document the current standings of our past, these people are called "urban explorers" and they have existed as individuals or small concentrations around the world for as long as buildings have

been left to decay. More recently though there has been a convergence of these explorers with the explosion of the social media sites that allow people to share stories, locations, photographs, videos and adventure with other explorers in ways that were never possible before. This new age of collaboration in this activity has sparked new explorers young and old alike to take up this hobby, this is a great step forward for this growing activity but there are certain precautions and rules that one needs to know before delving into these modern day ruins. This is a short guide to getting involved in urban exploration using the great resources that have become available via the internet.



Stay Connected

One of the most important things that one can do within the urban exploring scene is to find and connect with other explorers from around the world or even in their local area. There are all sorts of ways to connect with fellow explorers through various forums, one of the most popular and active is www.uer.ca were one can talk in specific boards that are dedicated to different regions across North America as well as a "world" thread for those who lie outside the given regions. Besides the forum the site offers a database of locations with information on locations available to full members, planned events, as well as a chat function.

Other means of connecting with some other explorers include sites dedicated to photography of abandoned buildings such as www.opacity.us, which showcases photos as well as descriptions of the experience of the outing written by a well known urban explorer. The site also provides a forum for those who frequent to discuss the photos or exploration in general, however if one

wanted to contact the owner of the site there is also a link to his e-mail. In a similar fashion there is a well known podcast called "American Urbex" which talks about certain photo outings as well as in-depth history of the locations discussed in the episode, one can also view the galleries from these shoots on the website. Some other episodes of the podcast are interviews conducted with various explorers and talk about their experiences and how they became involved in exploring.

Something that has not been done by explorers for a while is the publication of a magazine solely focused on exploring, there was a magazine called *Infiltration* produced by an explorer that ran about nine years from 1996-2005 however the author passed away and there has been a void in this means of communication until recently when *UE Mag* came out in 2012 which has since published 3 issues and has an accompanying website, www.uemag.com, with a fairly active forum in a similar fashion to uer.ca. that organizes events occasion-

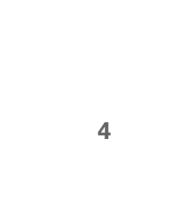
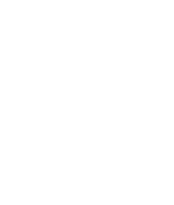
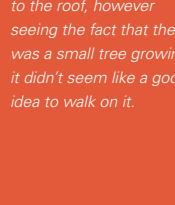
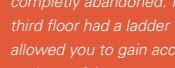
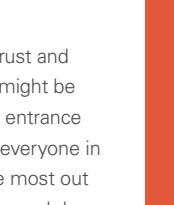
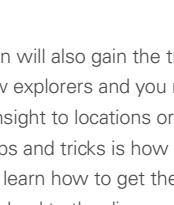
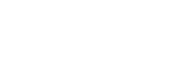
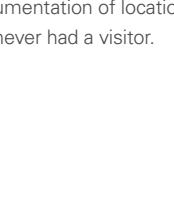
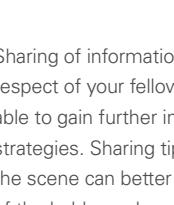
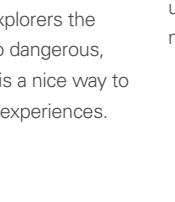
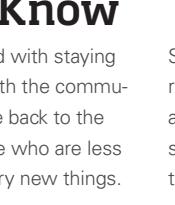
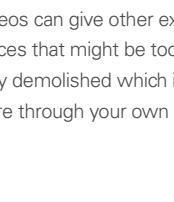
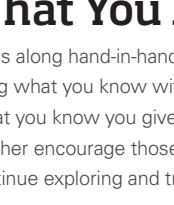
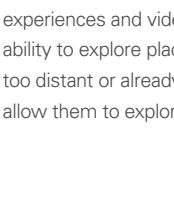
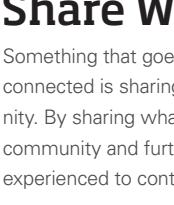
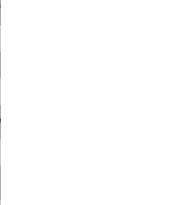
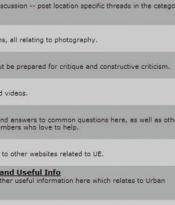
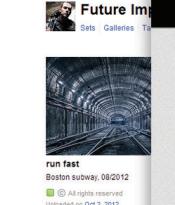
ally. The magazine consists of user generated content from the forums as well as mailed in submissions which gives the readers a way to share their stories in a different medium than what might have been otherwise available.

Another popular area for explorers to connect and communicate is through photography sites such as [www.FLICKR.COM](http://www.flickr.com) or [www.DEVANTART.COM](http://www.deviantart.com) where users post their photographs for critique or just to show what they have been up to. Regardless of which way or ways one chooses to connect with their fellow explorers it is crucial to keep checking in with them and communicate because you will build relationships that might someday lead to a meet up and the exploration of a new location or introduction to a new area of the hobby such the exploration of storm drains, which one might not have thought to investigate. Also by keeping in touch and participating in the community one will gain a better understanding of the current events or future plans that are relevant to locations or exploring as a whole.

Places to start

www.uer.ca
www.uemag.com
www.americanurbex.com
www.lostintimeue.com
www.opacity.us

For me I found that I started on uer.ca and branched out from there. The American Urbex podcast is interesting to listen to because the host does a great deal of research on each location and shares his story along with the location's history to paint a nice overview.



3

4

Something that struck me about these old wooden beams that support the structure is that they have survived far better than the rest of the building.



Share What You Know

Something that goes along hand-in-hand with staying connected is sharing what you know with the community. By sharing what you know you give back to the community and further encourage those who are less experienced to continue exploring and try new things. Sharing information in the form of stories, photos, experiences and videos can give other explorers the ability to explore places that might be too dangerous, too distant or already demolished which is a nice way to allow them to explore through your own experiences.

Sharing of information will also gain the trust and respect of your fellow explorers and you might be able to gain further insight to locations or entrance strategies. Sharing tips and tricks is how everyone in the scene can better learn how to get the most out of the hobby and can lead to the discovery and documentation of locations that might have otherwise never had a visitor.



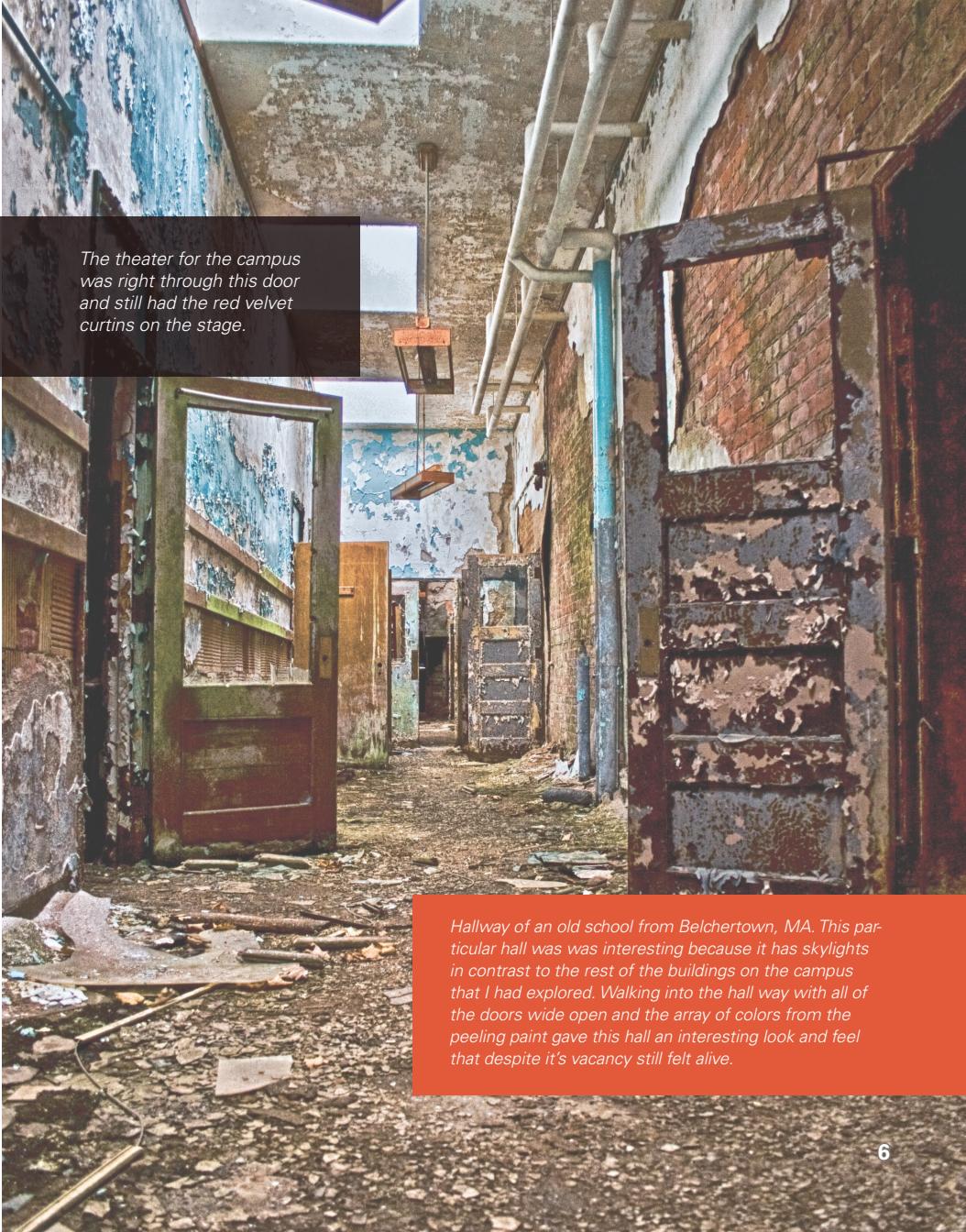
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Know The Risks (Legal)

While exploring there are sometimes where one might find themselves having to pass a "No Trespassing" sign or crawl through a semi-boarded up window to gain access to a location, this is obviously illegal and is a part of the legal risk in exploring such places.

However there are ways of entering these places legally by contacting the owner and getting permission to enter the location, but this is harder to accomplish since saying no and not having to worry about the possibility of you getting injured and suing them. Seeing as how the legal way of entry is typically not an option one should familiarize themselves with their state's laws on trespassing and what the fines and penalties could be.

Social urban exploration sites often have large forum threads that detail the legal issues that can arise from getting caught, this information can also be found easily on a state government's website. While knowing the risk is there and what the consequences might be does not mean that one will not get caught, if one does there is a good chance that staying put and talking to the police or security and telling them what you are there for will lead them to give you only a warning or tell you to leave, in some cases they will let you stay, however this is rare.



The theater for the campus was right through this door and still had the red velvet curtains on the stage.



Hallway of an old school from Belchertown, MA. This particular hall was interesting because it has skylights in contrast to the rest of the buildings on the campus that I had explored. Walking into the hall way with all of the doors wide open and the array of colors from the peeling paint gave this hall an interesting look and feel that despite its vacancy still felt alive.

4

Do Not Divulge the Names of Locations In Public

In slight contradiction to sharing what you know there is a limit to what one should share online in a public manner; this is not to say that you can't tell others names of locations or where they are, you just need to do it in a private means, via private messages, e-mails, phone calls or texts. The practice of not giving out location names is to protect you; the location and the social media network, there are vandals as well as police/security that do check these sites to find places to tag or to see if they need to raise security.

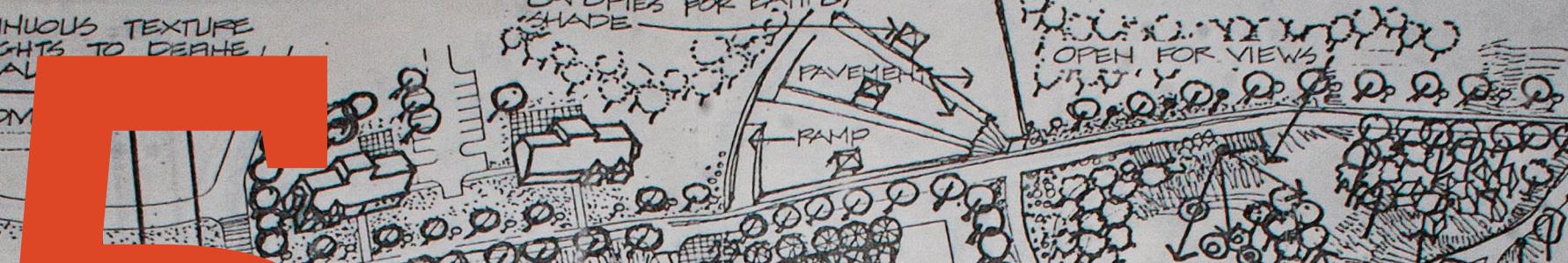
Once punks and vandals find a location it does not take long before the place gets trashed and we lose all of the interesting history that was once there, also

with these unwanted vandals comes the attention of the law which creates more problems for locations. The sites can also come across legal issues for "promoting" or facilitating trespassing, which could ultimately lead to the site being shut down.

Of course not everyone abides by this but it is a best practice to keep these locations around for others to explore. Another aspect to this practice is that some explorers like to find these places on their own and when the name and location are given to them it ruins the activity for them. When posting your stories, photos etc. either make up a name or leave it blank so as to still share your explores but keep the locations identity safe from the prying eyes of the law.



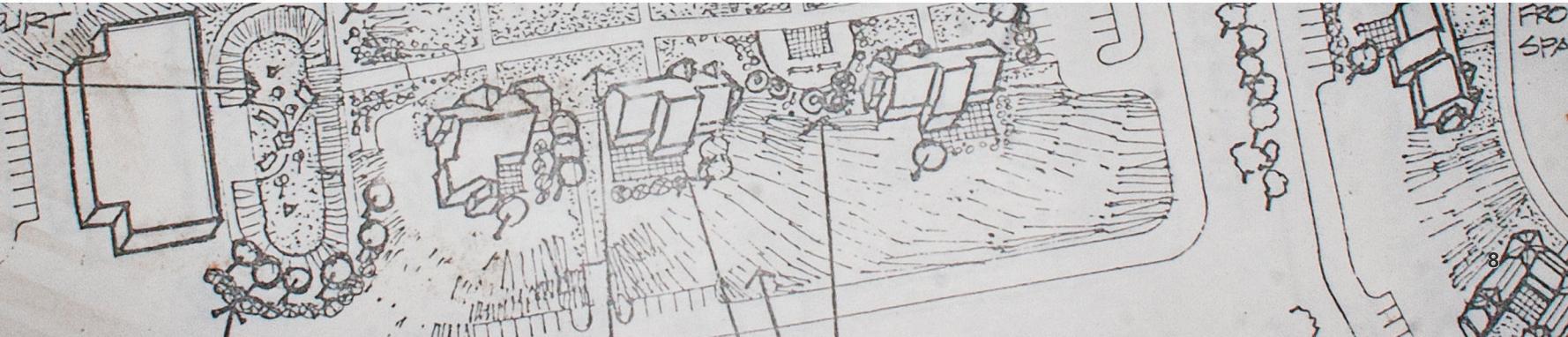
Spary paint, paint balls and broken sheetrock that really ruin the feel of this old factory and leaves evidence that people were here and will most likely cause the building to be either boarded up or demolished.



5

Do the research

Destroyed store room in a microchip plant from Amesbury, MA. Abandoned buildings tend to attract more than just explorers, many times young kids use these ruins as places to destroy and deface. This factory building is a favorite spot for many high school kids to hang out in, with one room even being turned into a poorly built half pipe. This particular room was in worse shape than the rest of the building, however behind me in the same room housed all of the plexiglass templates for the different microchips that the company once produced for companies ranging from small no names to Raytheon, Honeywell as well as others.



tion. The information you find before you explore a location will vastly increase your appreciation for the buildings, the people and the history behind the ruins that one finds themselves in.

Many locations have rich and controversial past that has eventually lead to its closing and abandonment. The history and information you find will also improve your chances of getting into a location sometimes maps of the location can be found, so one can better know which buildings they would like to visit or where good entry and exit points are for drains. Researching the area can let you know what areas near by are ok to park at without drawing attention.

Another benefit to researching the area is finding out if there are any public events that might cause the location to be harder to access. Social urban exploration sites often have histories of locations included within user posts, which can be helpful in gaining knowledge prior, however you might have to talk to the user who posted in private or put the puzzle pieces together to figure out what location they are talking about. One of the best reasons to search around the web is to see if the location is even still available to explore, there is nothing worse than getting all geared up and excited, driving there and finding that it was been destroyed for two years.

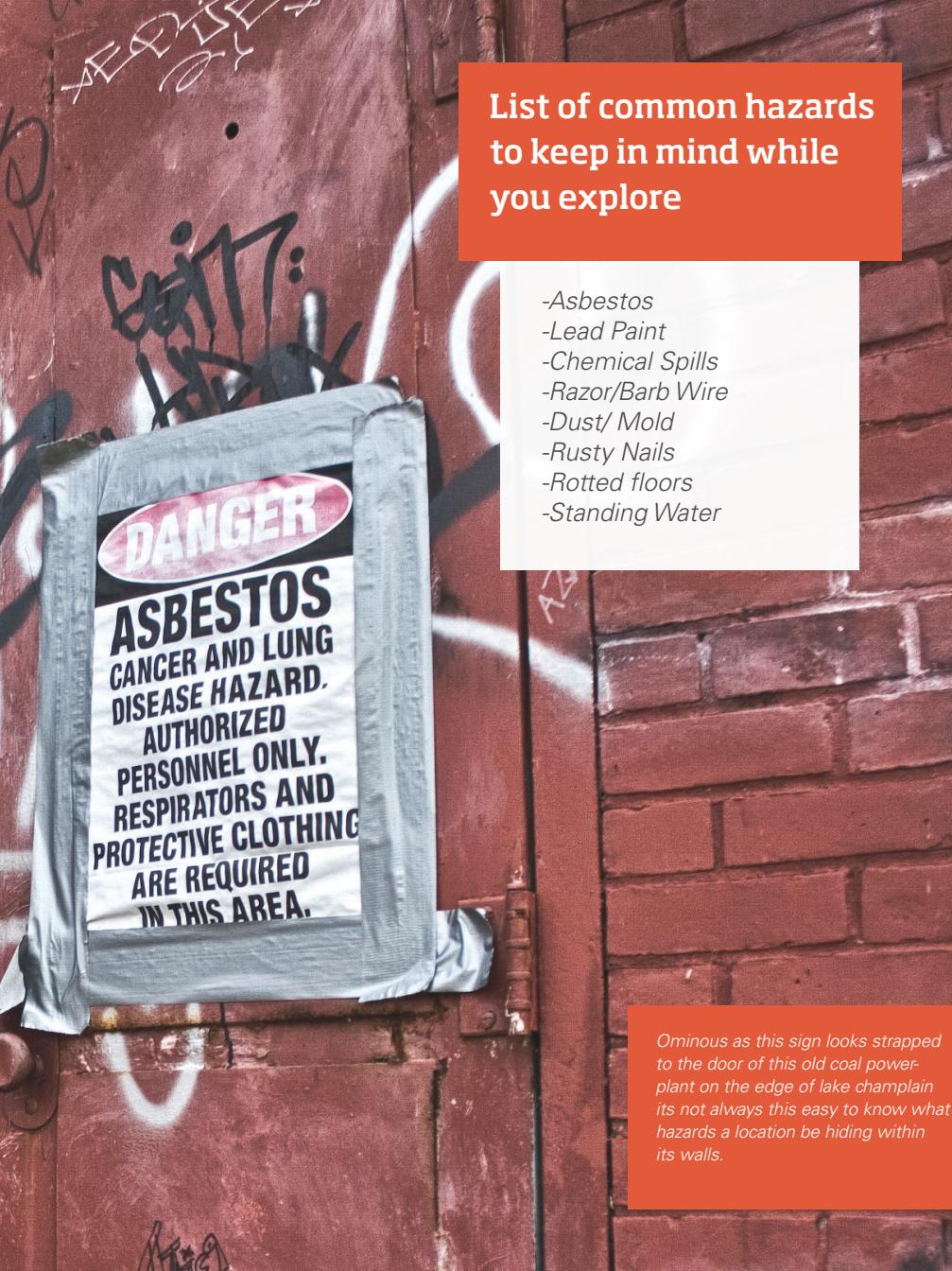
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Know the Hazards

Much like researching to better understand and appreciate a location one wants to familiarize themselves with the hazards present at the locations they will be visiting. There are hazards that one should know about before even attempting to explore such as certain chemical or nuclear hazards that should stop most explorers unless they have specific training or gear that will protect them.

However most locations will not have the extreme hazards but ones that should still be taken into consideration and be planned for. Any chemical spills that one finds might be present at a location should be researched and one should see what the health affects are as well as the ways that one can come into contact so that they can better assess how/if they are going to deal with the location. Common hazards include asbestos, lead paint, mold and dust which should all be taken seriously and not tossed aside. Knowing the hazards will allow one to properly decide which equipment that they will need to bring along with them.

Despite researching the hazards and bringing the right equipment it should be known that there can be serious injury from the state of decay, security measures such as razor wire or chain-link fence, as well as health problems that can develop later on in one's life. Talking online to other explorers one can get good first hand or second hand account of the affects of these hazards and can make their choices with a better understanding.



List of common hazards to keep in mind while you explore

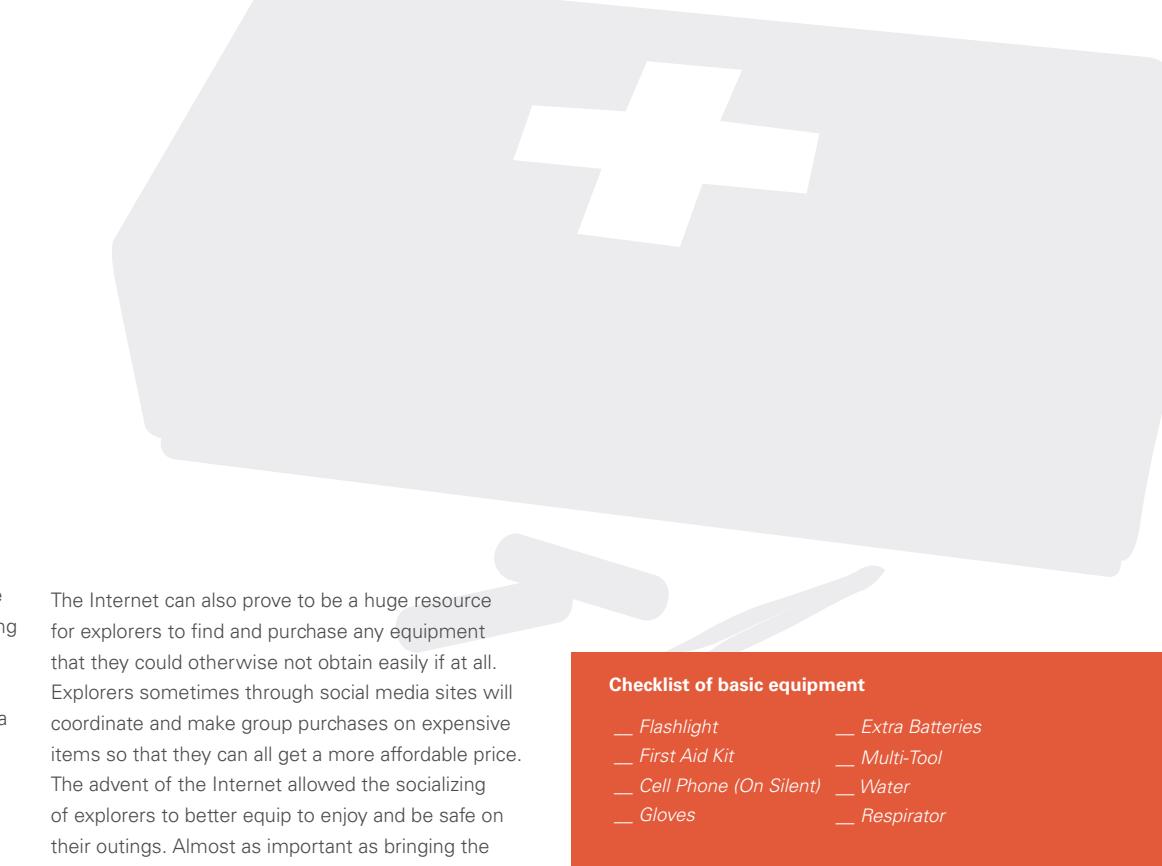
- Asbestos
- Lead Paint
- Chemical Spills
- Razor/Barb Wire
- Dust/ Mold
- Rusty Nails
- Rotted floors
- Standing Water

7

Bring the Right Equipment

The best thing one can do for oneself is to bring the proper equipment when they go exploring, by staying connected and sharing what one knows they can start to put together an exploration kit for the types of locations that they find most interesting. Having a well-stocked kit can make or break and explore, but even more important it can potentially save a life.

Equipment can vary from ladders, tripods, respirators, and flashlights to harnesses and pulleys; it all depends on the individual's interests. However despite what interests one has all kits should include first aid, water, snacks, a flashlight, cell phone and sturdy shoes. With social media it is quite easy to communicate with other explorers to figure out what one should have, as well as which specific pieces as far as brand or strength one should acquire.



Checklist of basic equipment

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Flashlight | <input type="checkbox"/> Extra Batteries |
| <input type="checkbox"/> First Aid Kit | <input type="checkbox"/> Multi-Tool |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cell Phone (On Silent) | <input type="checkbox"/> Water |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gloves | <input type="checkbox"/> Respirator |



These shoes were still on a shoe rack at a correctional school in Southern MA. Seeing these shoes as I made my way into the building made a shiver run down my spine knowing that these shoes had been there since their owner placed them there. The artifacts inside locations humanizes them and makes you realize that this place once was something real and important. The shoes here are a perfect example for this practice.

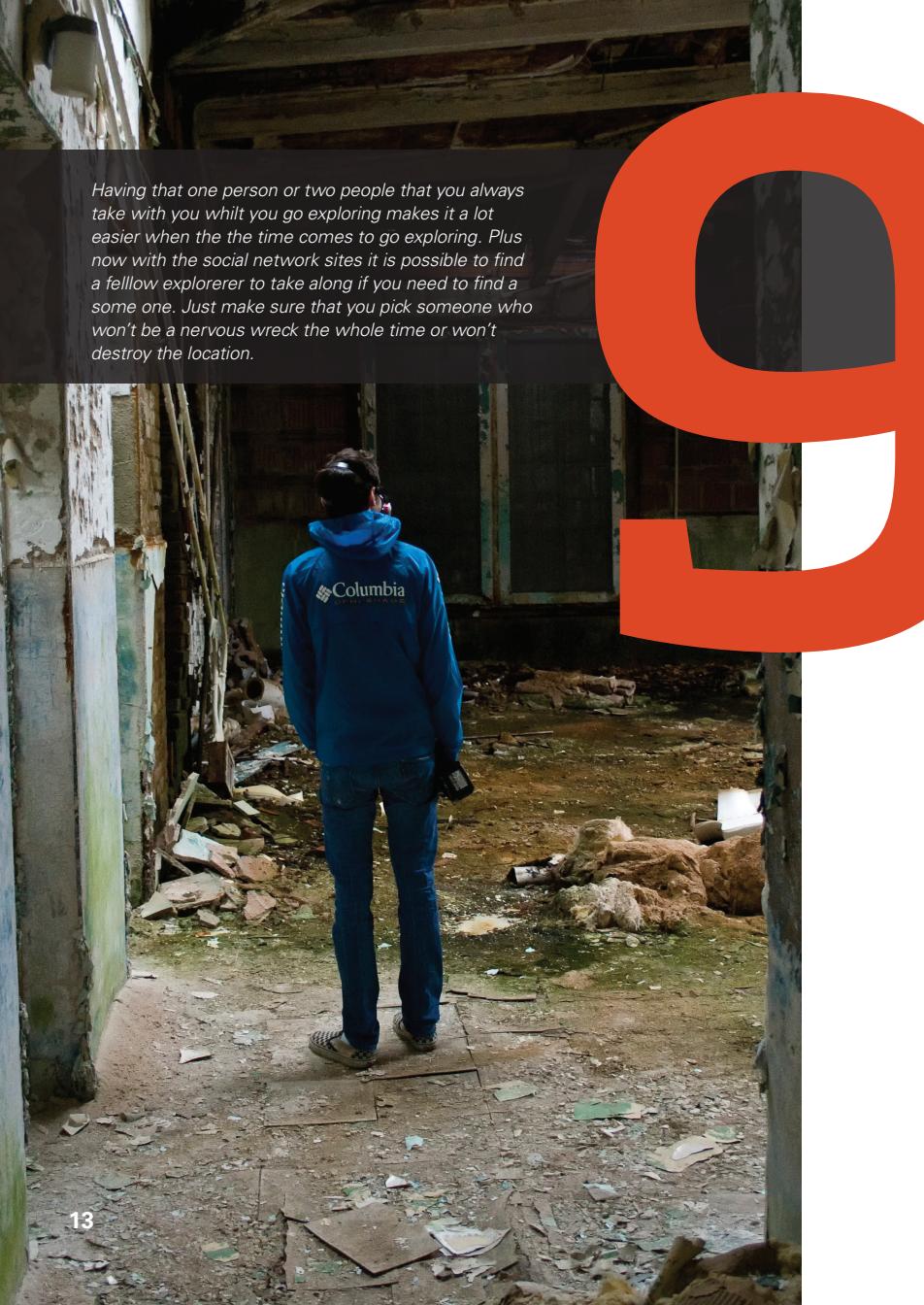
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Respect the Location

Even with the right equipment and knowing the hazards, doing the research one still has to be careful while they are out on an explore because conditions at locations change from visit to visit. It is not just respecting the power of the place that one is exploring it is respecting in a way that will preserve the history and the location's authenticity, which is embodied by one of the canons of urban exploration which is "take nothing by photographs, and leave nothing but footprints." This sentiment is supposed to keep these locations around for others to enjoy and should always be in the back of one's mind while exploring.

Explorers all over the world are familiar with and abide by this guideline and look down upon those who disregard it. This does not mean that you can't pick up or interact with the objects found in the locations, so interesting documents that you find and want to read or if one wanted to take a photo of a friend in a wheelchair as long as one does not destroy or take the object and places it back where it was found it still follows the guideline.

"Take nothing but photographs, leave nothing but foot prints."



Having that one person or two people that you always take with you whilst you go exploring makes it a lot easier when the time comes to go exploring. Plus now with the social network sites it is possible to find a fellow explorer to take along if you need to find a someone. Just make sure that you pick someone who won't be a nervous wreck the whole time or won't destroy the location.

Never Explore Alone

While exploring it is important that one takes a friend. It is a good idea to bring someone that one trusts because if something goes wrong you want someone who you know how they will react. Making sure that you never explore by yourself is critical because there are a number of things that could go wrong and most of the time one is off the beaten path and if something were to happen and they fell through a floor it would be a while before someone would find them and be able to help.

Friends also are a great help in reaching places that might require a leg up or a little extra strength to open, as well as an extra set of eyes so nothing is missed on an explore. Like the saying goes there is security in numbers and this certainly holds true while exploring,

abandonment is a free place to live for the homeless, a secret spot to distribute, store, grow or make drugs and should you stumble into some sort of trouble it is better to have another person with you as an added safety net, people are less likely to do anything when there is more than one person.

Friends can also scout out ahead or stand watch, which can give you a chance to explore something that might have otherwise left you vulnerable. Urban exploring sites are filled with people who are more often than not willing to meet up and explore, and it is easier than ever with these sites to communicate and set up plans.

Something to try while exploring

Many photographers use what is called light painting in their shots to highlight certain subjects, create new subjects out of the light or light a very dark area. Light painting is a simple concept but can take some trial and error to get it down.



While exploring an underground river with a friend I had met online we decided that we'd like to try and photograph this interesting section of the structure so we took turns running up and down this stretch lighting it while the other photographed at 2:45 am it was a great experience and couldn't have done it without his help, since these underground water ways are the darkest things I have ever experienced.

While walking through the water we could feel something was bumping into our waders, we quickly turned on our flashlights and could see that was eels and fish that were living down here in the river and probably didn't get many visitors.



10

By getting others involved in this activity you will absolutely get it back ten-fold, I have brought a two of my friends into urban exploring, both of which have come back to me and shared locations with me which we went and explored.

Get Others Involved

Urban exploring has enjoyed an influx of new people eager to explore the modern day ruins that are scattered across the world, however there are still those who can no longer participate and decide to call it quits. Which means that the community needs to find those who are interested and bring them in and mentor them and pass on the things they have learned to keep the cycle going. By bringing in these new explorers the community still remains strong and maintains a healthy presence which will ensure the continuation of the hobby as well as the sites, publications and services that have sprung up to make this hobby more wide spread. The task of keeping the community healthy before the social sites was much more difficult because knowledge of

the hobby was not so wide spread and the means of sharing locations as well as the hazards was not around but that all changed once the internet started to become a more affordable and normal part of life. With the Internet faster than it has ever been and connecting almost the entire globe explorers are poised to have all the tools they need to connect, document and share the abandonments, drains, mines, rooftops and other locations for everyone to appreciate thanks to the rise of the social media sites.

Conclusion

Exploring these forgotten places harkens back to our most basic instincts of curiosity and adventure, however now paired with the advances in technology and the explosion of the social networking sites it is one of the greatest times ever in the history of exploring. With people sharing stories and photographs from around the world it allows people to share easier and allows for people to meet other explorers around them which they might not have known about.

Now with all of the resources available so instantly it opens up exploring to newcomers in a safer way, allowing them to be able to talk to people who have more experience and research ahead of time to get the most out of their exploring. With these ten things you can start exploring places for yourself and experience places that few or none have experienced before you. Get exploring!

