

Constitution of the Aggie Grotto

Student Chapter of the National Speleological Society

Ratified: July 19, 2023

Article I. Name

The name of this student organization shall be known as the **Aggie Grotto**.

Article II. Purpose & Goals

The purpose of this organization shall be to promote interest in and to advance in any way the study and science of speleology and related fields as well as advance individual ability to safely cave and to promote fellowship among those therein.

Article III. Membership

Section I. Selection Process

Membership shall be open to all residents in the Bryan or College Station area. The Treasurer shall receive all membership applications in writing or electronically and submitted annually. Membership applications comprise dues, a safety waiver, a safe caving contract, and emergency contact information that are readily available from the Grotto's website.

The organization has the right to refuse the membership application of any individual by a majority vote of general members present at any meeting while being verified through meeting notes. The organization has the right to remove any member(s) from the club that violates the rules stated in the constitution or by a majority vote of general members present at any meeting while being verified through meeting notes.

Section II. Membership classification: Honorary, General, Associate, and Inactive.

- a. **Honorary members** are individuals to whom the membership is awarded by written consent of two-thirds of the total general membership of the organization.
- b. **General members** have all privileges of the Grotto, including the right to vote, hold office, serve as a committee member, attend vertical trainings, socials, events, meetings, and trips, become a vertical trainer, become a trip leader, and have access to organizational records, data, and equipment.

- c. **Inactive members** are former general members who are temporarily unable to participate in Grotto activities.

Section III. Removal Procedures

- a. Any member may be dropped or expelled from the Grotto by a two-thirds majority vote of the Officer Committee of the Grotto.
- b. Members to be dropped or expelled will be given a two-week notice with a letter of reasoning attached. At the end of the two weeks, a meeting will be held where the member to be dropped will plead their case, then a vote by the organization's Officer Committee will occur. If a vote fails, members cannot be voted on for removal for the same specific offense again during their time in the Grotto.
- c. Section III Subsection b. will be followed unless a member is to be dropped or expelled through the Safety Committee or Violation Committee. Under those circumstances, rules under the Committee are to be followed.
- d. Any member not in good standing can be changed from a general member to an inactive member by a majority vote of the Officer Committee.
- e. All general members must pay dues within twenty-four hours of submitting their application to the treasurer. All members defaulting on dues after a period of one week will be dropped from the Grotto's membership roster.
- f. A general member may acquire inactive status upon request of the Treasurer. The inactive member may be reinstated to their former status upon their request to the Treasurer.
- g. Any member may terminate their Grotto membership upon their request.

Section IV. Attendance

Attendance at weekly meetings and on grotto trips is optional; only dues, a safety waiver, a safe caving contract, and emergency contact information are necessary to become a member.

Article IV. Officers

Section I. Requirements

The officers of this organization must meet the following requirements:

- a. The officer must have held membership in the Aggie Grotto for a minimum of three months prior to running for an officer position.
- b. The officer must be a dues-paying member of the Grotto.
- c. The officer must be in good standing with the Grotto.
- d. The officer must be vertically checked off through the Grotto.
- e. The officer must be able to commit a minimum of four hours per week to the Grotto during the duration of their term.

- f. The officer cannot have been recommended to the Safety or Violations Committee within three months of them running for office.
- g. The officer must be a member of both the National Speleological Society and the Texas Cave Management Association.
- h. The officer must have been a member of a committee for a minimum of three months prior to running for an office position.

Section II. Officers and Duties

I. President

- a. Preside over Officer Committee meetings. This includes but is not limited to creating an agenda, facilitating discussion among officers, conducting votes within the Officer Committee, and ensuring the Committee remains focused.
- b. Preside over general meetings. This includes but is not limited to opening meetings, closing meetings, and presiding over any votes.
- c. The President will refrain from voting during Executive Committee, Officer Committee, and General business unless there is a tie.
- d. The President is responsible for facilitating and ensuring positive communication between officers and members. This includes but is not limited to maintaining an open-door policy for all members and officers, utilizing clear and efficient communication styles, and diffusing conflicts between members and officers.
- e. The President has the ability to use Executive Decision at their discretion. Executive Decision allows the President to immediately override any decision made by the Executive Committee, Officer Committee, or subsequent Committees regarding safety, legality, or Grotto Constitution. Executive Decisions can be vetoed with a majority vote of the Officer Committee.
- f. The President is responsible for aligning the Grotto with its mission and purpose. This includes but is not limited to helping fellow officers reach their goals and setting realistic goals/deadlines for the Grotto.
- g. The President is responsible for networking within the larger caving community. Networking provides the Grotto with various opportunities and is necessary for the Aggie Grotto to remain relevant. This includes but is not limited to attending caving events such as NSS Convention, TCR, and TSA Spring Convention.
- h. The President is responsible for ensuring sustainable leadership for the Aggie Grotto. This includes but is not limited to making decisions not for the current year but for years to come and administrative duties.
- i. The President is responsible for planning and scheduling trips. This includes but is not limited to making a general schedule outline for the semester, contacting land owners/property managers, securing trip leaders, ensuring a fair selection of members for trips, and assigning trip leaders.
- j. The President is responsible for overseeing the Violations Committee and being a member of the Safety Committee and Executive Committee.

- k. The President is responsible for maintaining the Aggie Grotto binder containing signed safety waivers, emergency contacts, membership lists, trip waivers, and the Aggie Grotto Constitution.

II. Vice President

- a. The Vice President is responsible for assuming the President's role when the President is unable to complete his/her duties.
- b. The Vice President is responsible in assisting the President in stewarding the Grotto. This includes but is not limited to taking on additional tasks and assisting fellow officers on reaching their goals.
- c. The Vice President is responsible for greeting members at the door of weekly meetings and maintaining the sign-in roster for meetings.
- d. The Vice President is responsible for leading meetings. This includes but is not limited to creating and updating the announcements portion of the meeting, presiding over trip drops/sign-ups, and being up to date on trip, event, and social information.
- e. The Vice President is responsible for maintaining the Aggie Speleological Society and Aggie Grotto GroupMes. This includes but is not limited to monitoring content, answering questions, and ensuring a positive and healthy virtual environment.
- f. The Vice President is to be responsible for all merch for the Aggie Speleological Society and Aggie Grotto. This includes but is not limited to creating new merchandise ideas, forwarding the placement of merchandise orders to the treasurer, and continually advertising on the Grotto's behalf. The Vice President should maintain a log of all merchandise options and ensure that merchandise purchases are routed to the Treasurer appropriately. The Vice President has no more than 72 hours to transfer cash payments to the Treasurer.
- g. The Vice President is responsible for planning general meeting topics throughout the year and scheduling guest speakers. This includes but is not limited to creating a meeting schedule, determining who is to give what presentations, contacting members of the larger caving community to guest speak at meetings, and researching topics in order to give informational presentations.
- h. The Vice President is required to be a member of the Executive Committee, Violation Committee, Safety Committee, and Outreach Committee.
- i. The Vice President is responsible for planning the Spring Break trip. This includes but is not limited to pulling permits, creating and maintaining sign-up sheets, creating a meal plan, and providing timely information to the Grotto.

III. Secretary

- a. The Secretary is responsible for detailed recordings of all Executive Committee, Officer Committee, and general meetings. This includes but is not limited to recording votes, final decisions made, and storing the information in the cavetamu@gmail.com Google Drive.
- b. The Secretary is responsible for checking the physical mailbox for the Aggie Speleological Society and Aggie Grotto located on Texas A&M University's campus.
- c. The Secretary is responsible for managing the cavetamu@gmail.com email account. This includes but is not limited to sending weekly Grotto emails, responding to and monitoring the email account, and ensuring professional communication is demonstrated by all that have access to the account.

- d. The Secretary is responsible for the Bi-Annual Grotto Newsletter. The Newsletter is to be released in August and January.
- e. The Secretary is responsible for managing the NSS I/O Report.
- f. The Secretary is responsible for in-person Guest Speakers. This includes but is not limited to securing a parking pass for our guests, finding lodging, ensuring the Grotto pays for their dinner, and presentation of the Thank You gift on behalf of the Grotto.
- g. The Secretary is a part of the Officer Committee and Executive Committee.

IV. Treasurer

- a. Shall collect dues, pay bills, oversee monetary transactions, prepare an annual budget, and maintain a log of active members' status. Duties include managing the aforementioned club monetary funds, monitoring physical assets, and updating them accordingly.
- b. The Treasurer is responsible for collecting dues from members of the Aggie Grotto.
- c. The Treasurer is responsible for paying all Aggie Grotto or Aggie Speleological Society bills on time.
- d. The Treasurer is responsible for taking the lead on all financial transactions. This includes but is not limited to purchasing items or reimbursing members.
- e. The Treasurer is responsible for preparing a rough 1, 3, and 5-year budget for the Grotto. This includes but is not limited to anticipating expenses and income.
- f. The Treasurer is responsible for maintaining a log of active member status and making it readily available in Google Drive.
- g. The Treasurer is responsible for maintaining funds and managing the Venmo account.
- h. The Treasurer is responsible for giving an update on finances at every Executive Committee and Officer Committee meeting.
- i. The Treasurer is responsible for issuing written membership cards to members of the Grotto once they have paid dues.
- j. The Treasurer oversees and maintains a log of club assets and updates them accordingly.
- k. The Treasurer is a part of the Officer Committee and Executive Committee.
- l. The Treasurer is responsible for registering the Aggie Speleological Society through Texas A&M University for the MSC Open House.

V. Quartermaster

- a. The Quartermaster is responsible for collecting money in the absence of the Treasurer.
- b. The Quartermaster is responsible for maintaining Grotto gear and equipment. This includes but is not limited to maintaining an accurate inventory, having a list for gear replacement, estimating costs on gear replacement for the Fall and Spring, and cleaning gear.
- c. The Quartermaster is responsible for maintaining a check-in and check-out log for Grotto gear and equipment.
- d. The Quartermaster is responsible for recommending purchases for the Grotto. This includes but is not limited to researching new equipment, engaging with gear companies to receive discounts, and maintaining a log of gear replacements.

VI. Webmaster

- a. The Webmaster is responsible for maintaining the Grotto website of cavetamu.com. This includes but is not limited to updating the Officer Committee page, ensuring the cave calendar is updated, adding trip reports, and adding photos.
- b. The Webmaster is responsible for managing trip reports. This includes but is not limited to obtaining trip reports from trip leaders and members, organizing trip reports within Google Drive, and ensuring the standard and quality of trip reports.
- c. The Webmaster is responsible for assisting members and Grotto affiliates with use of the Website.
- d. The Webmaster is expected to promote the use of the website within the Grotto and the larger caving community.
- e. The Webmaster is responsible for managing passwords for the Aggie Grotto accounts. This includes but is not limited to the Google Drive, Instagram, and Venmo.

VII. Safety Officer

Shall present the cave safety presentation and maintain the club's first aid kits. Shall also hold the member's emergency contact sheets.

- a. The Safety Officer should maintain the Grotto's first aid kits. This includes but is not limited to coordinating with Treasurer for purchases, coordinating with Quartermaster on status of the first aid kit, and ensuring the Grotto has 2 in cave and 1 surface first aid kit.
- b. The Safety Officer is responsible for giving the Grotto safety presentation in the fall and summer. This includes but is not limited to preparing up to a 45 minute presentation, researching caving accidents and incidents, and being up to date on first aid techniques.
- c. The Safety Officer is responsible for presiding over the Safety Committee.
- d. The Safety Officer is a member of the Vertical Training Committee.
- e. The Safety Officer is responsible for creating, updating, and maintaining Standard Operating Procedures for regular and advanced vertical training, and safe caving. This includes but is not limited to maintaining a document in Google Drive, researching updates in regard to safety, and ensuring documents are easily digestible.
 - i. These documents should be referenced through the National Speleological Society standards in regard to vertical training and overall safety.
- f. The Safety Officer is responsible for creating, updating, and maintaining advanced and regular vertical training tests. This includes but is not limited to standardizing the Grotto's testing procedures and reviewing the validity of our testing process.
- g. The Safety Officer is responsible for creating, updating, and maintaining a vertical check-off list. This includes but is not limited to verifying members have completed training, coordinating with vertical trainers to ensure the list is accurate, and keeping the spreadsheet easily accessible in the Google Drive.
- h. The Safety Officer is responsible for ensuring each member signs a safety waiver and maintaining a record.
- i. The Safety Officer is responsible for having knowledge of first aid practices and being able to act upon them in an emergency situation.

VIII. Social Media Officer

- a. The Social Media Officer is responsible for managing the Aggie Grotto Instagram, @cavetamu. This includes but is not limited to regular posting, answering Direct Messages, and interacting with other Grottos via the platform.
- b. The Social Media Officer is responsible for managing Aggie Grotto Facebook. This includes but is not limited to regular posts, answering Direct Messages, interacting with other Grottos and caving groups, and interacting with Aggie Grotto and Aggie Speleological Society Alumni.
- c. The Social Media Officer is responsible for managing the Aggie Grotto Youtube. This includes but is not limited to end-of-semester slideshows, vertical training information, and trip and cave reviews.
- d. The Social Media Officer is the Head of the Outreach Committee.
- e. The Social Media Officer is responsible for creating and publishing infographics for the Grotto. This includes but is not limited to MSC Open House flyers and cave one-pagers.

Section III. Election Process

Election of officers shall be held annually at the end of April or the beginning of May and announced by the President no less than two weeks in advance. The election will occur during an official meeting of the Grotto and will be decided by the majority vote of general members.

Vacancies in the Officer Team shall be filled for the remainder of the term by a majority vote of the general members during a special election held during an official meeting of the Grotto announced by the President no less than one week in advance.

Section IV. Removal of an Officer

The members of the Grotto may remove an officer from office by majority vote from the Officer Team or a two-thirds majority vote of the membership.

For members to move to impeach any officer, they must first inform the Officer Team via email to cavetamu@gmail.com with their reasonings. The Impeachment vote must occur within one month of the email being received.

Prior to voting on impeachment, the officer will be given at minimum two weeks notification with a letter of reason. At the end of the two weeks, a special meeting will be held during an official meeting of the Grotto. There the officer in question is given the opportunity to share their perspective, a brief Q&A no more than 15 minutes in length, and the vote.

If the vote fails, the officer cannot be put up for removal for the same offense in a sixth-month period. The Officer Committee vote and the member votes are mutually exclusive and do not influence each other with the Member vote superseding the Officer Committee vote.. If the vote is successful, the officer will be immediately removed. The officer will still retain their membership with the Grotto.

The Executive Committee will appoint a temporary officer until the emergency officer vote is conducted no more than one month after the impeachment date.

Article VI. Meetings

- A. Regular meetings shall be held weekly on Thursdays.
- B. Special meetings may be called at such times and places as approved by the Executive Committee. The membership shall be notified as to the date, place, and purpose of any such meeting at least one week in advance thereof.
- C. At least two Officer Committee members must be present to conduct an official General meeting.
- D. At least two Executive Committee members must be present to conduct an official Officer Committee meeting.

Article VII. Finances

Section I. Dues

Semester and annual dues shall be set by a majority vote of the Officer Team. Each member will be required to pay their dues within twenty-four hours of submitting their application for membership. All members defaulting on dues for a period of longer than a week will be dropped from the Grotto membership roster.

Section II. Financial Transactions

All monies belonging to this Grotto shall be handled by the Treasurer. The Treasurer maintains the Grotto's physical money and the Grotto Venmo account. All financial transactions and reimbursements will be voted on by the entire Officer Committee before they are made.

Article VIII. Committees

Section I. Permanent committees

Shall be established to execute the work of the Grotto. The chairman of any permanent committee not outlined in the Aggie Grotto Constitution will be appointed by a majority vote of the general members at any regularly scheduled meeting. Each chairman shall select the personnel and promote the activities of this committee. The President of the Grotto may appoint other committees as required.

Section II. Duties of the permanent committees

Shall be to study, promote an interest in and work toward the advancement of all matters pertaining to their field of activity. All final decisions made by Permanent Committees are to be sent to the Executive Committee within one week for approval. The Executive Committee has one week to respond to the Permanent Committee in question with reasonings to not approve their decision. If the Executive Committee approves the Permanent Committee's decision they have 3 business days to notify the chairman. The President of the Grotto shall resolve any questions of conflicting jurisdiction of committees.

Section III. Officer Committee

The Officer Committee is any member elected into office by the General Members. They have the ability to remove officers, preside over votes, and administrative decisions representing the club. Additionally these members are required to uphold general officer standards as well as the tasks associated with their position during their tenure. The Officer Committee shall strive to reflect the wants and desires of the General Members of the grotto within reason.

Section IV. Executive Committee

The Executive Committee is comprised of the President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer. These members are allowed to call special meetings to determine action in time sensitive situations, preside over inner-officer votes, and complete any additional administrative decisions representing the club. These members are required to satisfy requirements of the Officer Committee.

Section V. Violation Committee

The Violation Committee will be presided over by the President. The remaining members of the Committee are to be comprised of the Vice President, Secretary, and two General Members from the Grotto that have been members for a duration longer than three months. The two General Members will be chosen by a majority vote of the Officer Committee.

Members are subject to the Violation Committee when a violation against the Constitution or Safe Caving Contract are committed.

Members will be notified within a week of the infraction by the President verbally and in a written document. During this time the member will be unable to participate in any Grotto trips. Within two weeks of the infraction a special meeting is to be held by the Violation Committee with all Committee members present as well as the member in question. These meetings can be virtual or in person. During this special meeting an explanation of the violation will be given by the President, the member in question will have an opportunity to explain their reasonings, then a vote will be held by the Violation Committee. While the Violation Committee is deliberating the member in question should not be present. The President will preside over the vote and inform the member of the final decision.

The Violation Committee decisions will be by majority vote of the Committee. The President will only vote if a tie arises. The Violation Committee can vote to invoke corrective measures or removal of the member depending on the severity of the infraction. Corrective measures will be determined on a case by case basis by the Violation Committee.

Section VI. Safety Committee

The Safety Committee will be presided over by the Safety Officer. The remaining Committee members are to be comprised of the President, Vice President, and two General Members from the Grotto that have been members for a duration longer than three months. The two General Members will be chosen by a majority vote of the Officer Committee.

Members are subject to the Safety Committee when a violation against the Constitution or Cave Safety Contract are committed.

Members will be notified within a week of the infraction by the Safety Officer verbally and in a written document. During this time the member will be unable to participate in any Grotto trips. Within two weeks of the infraction a special meeting is to be held by the Safety Committee with all Committee members present as well as the member in question. These meetings can be virtual or in person. During this special meeting an explanation of the violation will be given by the Safety Officer, the member in question will have an opportunity to explain their reasonings, then a vote will be held by the Safety Committee. While the Safety Committee is deliberating the member in question should not be present. The Safety Officer will preside over the vote and inform the member of the final decision.

The Safety Committee decisions will be by majority vote of the Committee. The Safety Officer will only vote if a tie arises. The Safety Committee can vote to invoke corrective measures or removal of the member depending on the severity of the infraction. Corrective measures will be determined on a case by case basis by the Safety Committee.

Section VII. Outreach Committee

The Outreach Committee will be presided over by either the Social Media Officer or a member elected by a majority vote of the General Members during an Official Grotto meeting. The remaining committee members are to be comprised of volunteers along with the Vice President.

The purpose of the Outreach Committee is to assist the Officer team in planning, creating, and hosting socials and participating in events in the larger caving community. This is to include but is not limited to: advertising in the Grotto GroupMe, acquiring materials, crafting, logistical planning, set-up, theme conceptualization, photography, and overseeing clean-up. The Outreach Committee is

to preside over ASSoween, ASS Formal, ASS Blowout, Texas Caver Reunion (TCR) Aggie Speleo-olympics, and Texas Speleological Society (TSA) Spring Convention.

The Outreach Committee will contact the President at minimum 7 days prior to the event or social to request funds for a social or event. The request must be made via email to cavetamu@gmail.com with an item list and justification. The President will respond to the Outreach Committee Head within 3 days with approval or denial. The treasurer will then either make purchases themselves or reimburse a singular member of the Outreach Committee for purchases for approved items.

The Outreach Committee will contact the Officer Team via the President at minimum 14 days prior to the social with the proposed theme. The Officer Team will then approve or deny the theme based on its alignment with the Aggie Grotto Constitution by a majority vote. The President will contact the Outreach Committee Head within 4 days of the original proposal with the result. If the proposal fails the Outreach Committee has 24 hours to submit a new proposal to the President. The Officer Team will then approve or deny the theme based on its alignment with the Aggie Grotto Constitution by a majority vote and respond within 24 hours to the Outreach Committee. After the second failed proposal the Executive Committee will decide the theme for the social.

The Outreach Committee will submit a proposal to cavetamu@gmail.com for the TCR Speleo-olympics to be approved or denied by the Officer Team no less than 21 days prior to TCR. The Officer Team will then review the plan for safety, feasibility, difficulty, and representation of the Aggie Spirit. The President will respond to the Outreach Committee Head within 3 days with an approval or 7 days with a denial complete with justifications. The Outreach Committee will then have 3 days to respond with a corrected proposal. The Officer Team will repeat the review and respond within 3 days with an approval or denial. If the proposal fails for a second time the Executive Committee will decide the final layout for TCR Speleo-olympics. The Outreach Committee will contact the President at minimum 10 days prior to TCR to request funds or 7 days after proposal approval. The request must be made via email to cavetamu@gmail.com with an item list and justification.

Section VII. Vertical Training Committee

The Vertical Training Committee Head will be chosen by a vote of the Officer Committee. The Officer Committee should approach only the most experienced and vertically advanced members for this role. The rest of the members comprising the committee will be vertical trainers for the Aggie Grotto.

The purpose of this committee is to improve upon the standardization, efficiency, and techniques used in teaching beginning members Single Rope Techniques via the Frog System. This committee is responsible for providing vertical training opportunities in a safe learning environment.

Each Vertical Trainer must be reviewed and approved by this Committee by a majority vote.

Article IX. Conduct

Section I. Behavior within the Grotto

Members should interact with each other in accordance with the *Golden Rule*.

- A. Treat others as you would like to be treated (positive or directive form).
- B. Do *not* treat others in ways that you would *not* like to be treated (negative or prohibitive form).
- C. What you wish upon others, you wish upon yourself (empathetic or responsive form).

If conflicts cannot be solved directly between two members they should approach a member of the Executive Committee for assistance/mediation.

Those in violation are subject to review by the Violation Committee. Any member can recommend another member to the Violation Committee.

Section II. Behavior towards other Grottos, Landowners, and Organizations

Members should interact with members or individuals of other Grottos, landowners, and organizations in the same way as with members from the Aggie Grotto.

Members should do their best to represent themselves and the Aggie Grotto in the best light possible.

Those in violation are subject to review by the Violation Committee. Any member can recommend another member to the Violation Committee.

Section III. Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, and Sexual Assault

The Aggie Grotto is committed to providing a safe environment for all its members free from discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexual assault on any ground. The Aggie Grotto will operate a zero-tolerance policy for any form of sexual harassment in any environment the Aggie Grotto operates in, treat all incidents seriously, and promptly investigate all allegations. All complaints will be taken seriously and treated with respect and in confidence. No one will be victimized for making such a complaint.

Those in violation are subject to review by the Violation Committee. Any member can recommend another member to the Violation Committee.

Article X. Amendments and Ratification of the Constitution

Section I. Amendments to the Constitution

Any member may put forth an Amendment to the Constitution during any General Meeting. Amendments must be voted on in a period no longer than three weeks after it was proposed. The President will preside over the vote and will not vote unless there is a tiebreaker. The General Membership must be notified by the Secretary of the time, date, and place of the special vote no less than three days in advance. Amendments must receive a $\frac{3}{4}$ majority vote from the General Members present at the meeting in order to pass. If the Amendment fails there must be a period of three months before it is brought to a vote again.

Each time the Constitution is amended a copy must be placed in possession of the Webmaster, the ASS library, and the binder the President maintains.

Section II. Ratification of the Constitution

In 2023 new officers were elected to the Officer Committee of the Aggie Grotto. These officers decided amongst themselves that a document with clear defined guidelines and expectations was long overdue and essential for the success of the Aggie Grotto.

Jenna Crabtree (President), Jakob Denton (Vice President), William Flack (Secretary), Isabelle Peterson (Treasurer), Caleb Crubaugh (Quartermaster), Josephine Shaw (Safety Officer), Luke Anderson (Web Master), and Paige Hudson (Social Media Officer) spent the entire Summer of 2023 writing, re-writing, discussing, and voting on this document to give future generations of the Aggie Grotto firm ground to stand on.

These officers designed this Constitution to be a living document and easily adaptable to the quick changing world of a student grotto. The Aggie Grotto Constitution was originally ratified on July 19, 2023 and from thereon shall be amended.

The Aggie Grotto official constitution will be placed on a flash drive in the ASS library, possession of the Webmaster, and a hardcopy placed in the binder maintained by the President.

Section III. Amendments

- I. Going forth the President, Vice President, and Safety Officer will research future gear purchases alongside the Quartermaster, in order to produce the most fruitful and sustainable purchase for the Grotto.
- II. The Aggie Grotto will abide by the rules of the Vertical Caving SOP when vertical caving in the future. This document can be found in the index of the Constitution.

- III. Going forth the Aggie Grotto will strive to purchase equipment based off of the highest safety rating, certifications, or other reasonable documentation alongside the recommendation of multiple outside seasoned cavers who are regarded in the wider caver community as safe, dependable, and risk-avoidant.
- IV. Changing the title of Social Media Officer to Social and Outreach Officer to be more in line with their duties and contribution to the Grotto.
- V. Changing the title of Social Media Officer to Social and Outreach Officer to be more in line with their duties and contribution to the Grotto.

Article XI. Annex

Section I. Safe Caving Contract

Safe Caving Contract

Please read through and initial next to each statement that you agree with. The Safe Caving Contract is an integral document to becoming a member of the Aggie Grotto and outlines many of our expectations and guidelines for safe caving. You are subject to the Violation or Safety Committee for infractions committed after signing this document..

I understand that dropping a trip within 48 hours of departure will result in missing the next calendar trip that the Aggie Grotto offers. I understand that there will be exceptions made by the Executive Committee on a case by case basis.

I understand that dropping a trip within 48 hours of departure twice within a season will result in missing the rest of the trips offered for that season. I understand that there will be exceptions made by the Executive Committee on a case by case basis. Ex: You drop a trip in August and September, you will not be allowed on trips until January.

I understand that during the trips, Trip Leaders are in charge. I will follow all instructions given by Trip Leaders to the best of my abilities and communicate if I do not understand instructions.

I understand that caving is recognized as an extreme sport. I understand that similar to professional athletes I must also prepare my body and mind for caving.

- A. I will never enter a cave under the influence of any substances other than what has been medically prescribed to me.
- B. I will communicate with my trip leader if I feel unwell before entering the cave and choose to excuse myself from the trip.
- C. I will communicate with my trip leader and those around me if I ever feel like I cannot continue on while inside of a cave.
- D. I will monitor my physical fitness levels and excuse myself from a cave if I feel that I cannot physically complete the trip.
- E. I will bring any medication that is prescribed to me that is taken on less than a 24 hour basis with me into the cave in a waterproof bag or container.

- F. I will excuse myself from a trip if I ever feel that I am mentally not in the right head space to be caving.
- G. I understand that I will never be penalized for listening to my body and communicating with others.

I understand that caving is a team sport.

- A. I will never enter a cave alone or without having a surface watch.
- B. I will never leave the group while in a cave to explore alone. I understand if I do so the Trip Leader will remove everyone from the cave and the trip will be terminated.
- C. I will always keep in clear vision the headlamp in front of and behind me. If the group is moving too fast I will communicate this to the person in front of me.
- D. I understand that horseplay is not allowed in cave and can directly result in harm to my fellow cavers.
- E. I will communicate instructions while in cave from the person in front of me to the person behind me to ensure the safest caving practices.

Section II. Safety Waiver

DISCLOSURE: Participation in caving and cave-related activities is inherently dangerous. The level and type of participation in such activity is, at all times, completely voluntary and up to the individual. There is a RISK, which must be assumed by each participant, that he or she may suffer emotional or physical injury, disability or death.

Therefore, participants are responsible for their own safety and self-rescue in the event they get stuck. Participation should only be attempted, in its entirety, by people familiar and proficient with the techniques required to endure the activity.

In consideration of being permitted to participate on a trip with the Aggie Grotto:

DUTY OF SAFETY: I agree that I assume the inherent risk of these activities. I agree to use care at all times, wear safety equipment including a helmet and gloves, check lines and attachments, and behave in all ways appropriately cautious to the situation.

RELEASE OF LIABILITY: I release for myself and my personal representatives, heirs and next of kin, for all loss of damage, and from every claim, demand, action or right of action, of whatsoever kind or nature either in law or in equity, on account of physical or mental injury to person or property, or resulting in death, whether caused by the negligence of the Aggie Grotto or Aggie Grotto representative(s) or otherwise while participating in the activity described above.

PERSONAL LIMITATIONS: I have disclosed all of my relevant physical or mental limitations. I agree that it is my sole responsibility to know and correctly judge which limitations should be disclosed.

INDEMNIFICATION: I agree to indemnify the Aggie Grotto and all representatives of the Aggie Grotto from any loss, liability, damage or cost that may incur due to my participation, whether

caused by the negligence of the Aggie Grotto or otherwise. I expressly agree that this agreement is intended to be as broad and inclusive as permitted by the laws of the state of Texas and that if any portion of this agreement is held invalid, it is agreed that the balance shall, notwithstanding, continue to full legal force and effect. This release contains the entire agreement between myself and the and the terms of this agreement are contractual and not a mere recital.

MUST BE COMPLETED BY PARENT / GUARDIAN IF PARTICIPANT IS UNDER 18

Name: _____ Date: _____
Address: _____
Signature: _____

Section III. Contact Information

Aggie Grotto Contact Information

Personal Information:

Name (first, last): _____

Phone Number: _____

Email: _____

Address: _____

Car (make, model, year, color): _____

Existing Allergies and their severity: _____

Existing Injuries: _____

Any medication you will bring on a trip: _____

Any additional medical information a trip leader will need: _____

(Optional)

Insurance Provider: _____

Policy Number: _____

Emergency Contact Information Primary:

Name (first, last): _____

Phone Number: _____

Email: _____

Emergency Contact Information Secondary:

Name (first, last): _____

Phone Number: _____

Email: _____

- ☐ I would like you to notify my Primary Contact if I am injured.
- ☐ I would like you to notify my Secondary Contact if I am injured.
- ☐ I would *not* like you to notify my Primary and Secondary Contact if I am injured, unless it is required by the situation. Ex: Unconsciousness, serious injury, etc.
- ☐ I would prefer that the Grotto (outside of the trip) not be notified of my injury until a later time and date.

Section IV. Standard Operating Procedures

I. Regular Vertical Training

1. Purpose of Vertical Training Standard Operating Procedure

The purpose of this Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) is to provide guidelines and safety protocols in order to minimize the risk associated with conducting vertical caving activities. This Aggie Grotto Standard Operating Procedure provides guidelines on the Single Rope Technique procedures and policy adopted by the Aggie Grotto as of August 2023.

2. Vertical Training Committee

The Vertical Training Committee will reference and update this document as needed as standards develop. Committee information is provided in the Aggie Grotto Constitution.

3. Safety Committee

This Committee will reference and recommend updates to this document as needed as standards develop. Committee information is provided in the Aggie Grotto Constitution.

3.1. Violations and Sanctions

The Safety Committee is responsible for deliberating vertical related safety violations as detailed in the Aggie Grotto Constitution.

4. Pre-Planning Procedures

4.1. Obtain Detailed Information

Gather as much information as possible about the cave or pit prior to any caving. Permitted access should be acquired through local cave management or landowners. Obtain maps, surveys, reports; consult with experienced cavers, local authorities, and landowners to understand the cave's characteristics, potential hazards, and recent incident history.

4.2. Assess Participant Experience

Ensure that all participants have been checked-off for the appropriate level of vertical proficiency before acceptance to a vertical caving trip.

4.3. Initial Equipment Check

Conduct a thorough inspection of all vertical caving equipment before any SRT. Check harnesses, helmets, ropes, descenders, ascenders, carabiners, and lighting devices for signs of wear, damage, or defects. Replace any compromised gear with new, reliable equipment. If unsure of quality, always reference standards with the Quartermaster or fellow members.

4.4. Communication Plan

Establish a communication plan for the entire caving team. Ensure everyone understands the importance of communication, from cave hazard reporting to surface watch protocols.

5. Training and Qualifications

Members must undergo training in vertical caving techniques to qualify for vertical caving trips. Obtaining a vertical checkoff qualifies a member as vertically proficient at

that level. Detailed records of individual qualifications, experience, and any additional training members receive will be tracked by the grotto's Safety Officer.

5.1. Vertical Training Structure

5.1.1. Basic Vertical Training

A vertical trainer will refer to the following structure when determining the **MINIMUM** curriculum to demonstrate and teach a beginner Vertical Caver with the Frog System:

Session One:

- Rope specifications and quality assurance
 - Uses, Sheath/Core check, Rope Pads
- Names and purposes of individual gear components
 - Harness
 - D-Ring
 - Rack
 - Croll
 - Hand Ascender
 - Cowstails
 - Gear setup - “Cavers(Croll) Reveal(Rack) Hidden(HA) Chambers(Cows)”
 - Emphasis on proper fit and orientation of individual gear
- Rope and pit commands
 - On Rope
 - Rope Free
 - OK
 - ROCK!
 - STOP!
 - Emergency On Rope
 - Stand By
 - On Belay? (to be belayed)
 - Belay On (when belaying)
 - Off Belay (when being belayed)
 - Belay Off (when done belaying)
 - Dropping Rope

Session Two:

- Gear Setup - Allow members to setup prior to any instruction and explain potential issues with incorrect layouts
- Ascending with the Frog System
 - Emphasis on climbing efficiency
- Down-Climbing with the Frog System
- Knots - figure 8, figure 8 on a bight, double figure 8, alpine butterfly

Session Three:

- Gear Setup- Encourage members to check other participants setups and emphasize details like quality
- Changeover
- Descending on a Micro Rack
 - RIGHT HAND BREAK HAND
- Knots - figure 8, figure 8 on a bight, double figure 8

5.1.2. Advanced Vertical Training

A vertical trainer will refer to the following structure when determining the **MINIMUM** curriculum to demonstrate and teach an advanced Vertical Caver with the Frog System:

- Rebelay Crossing
- Knot Crossing
- J-Hang/U-Hang Crossing
- Pace and comfortability on Rope
- Knots - bowline, figure 8, figure 8 on a bight, double figure 8, alpine butterfly, Münter hitch, water knot, prusik

5.2. Basic Check-Off: Physical and Written Tests

After attending three sessions as detailed above, members become eligible to be vertically “checked off” **ONE WEEK** after their last session.

During this period they may take the **WRITTEN BASIC TEST**.

Check-off slots will be offered at every training session, and are on a first-come, first-serve basis. If a member is unable to attend any regular session in order to be checked off, they must reach out to an officer or vertical trainer to coordinate a time to do so.

TRAINERS MAY NOT PROVIDE ANY INSTRUCTION DURING PHYSICAL TEST, or the member's attempt will be considered a fail and they may repeat at the next available session, with the recommendation of attending additional training sessions.

5.3. Advanced Check-Off: Physical and Written Tests

After attending three sessions as detailed above, members become eligible to be vertically "checked off" **ONE WEEK** after their last session.

During this period they may take the **WRITTEN ADVANCED TEST**.

Check-off slots will be offered at every training session, and are on a first-come, first-serve basis. If a member is unable to attend any regular session in order to be checked off, they must reach out to an officer or vertical trainer to coordinate a time to do so.

TRAINERS MAY NOT PROVIDE ANY INSTRUCTION DURING PHYSICAL TEST, or the member's attempt will be considered a fail and they may repeat at the next available session, with the recommendation of attending additional training sessions.

6. Advancement

A member must complete three vertical sessions and an individual check-off to be considered for advancement. They must also complete a written test. Both the physical and written tests are Pass/Fail- a member must score 100% to receive credit. The **member** is responsible for **reporting ALL TRAININGS AND TESTS** to the Safety Officer. Records will be maintained by the grotto's Safety Officer.

7. Basic Vertical Checkoff Requirements

7.1. Physical Test:

- Proper gear setup and identification
- Upclimb a minimum of 5 meters in 10 minutes
- Downclimb a minimum of 5 meters in 10 minutes
- Upclimb, changeover, and descend in 10 minutes
- Perform test of descent device before full descent
- No mistakes or reattempts during checkoff

7.2. Written Test:

Written test includes identification of gear names, purposes, and proper setup; SRT techniques, and proper caving practices. Members must score 100% to receive credit.

8. Advanced Vertical Requirements

8.1. Physical Test:

- Proper gear setup
- Complete Aggie Grotto Advanced Vertical Course under 15 minutes
 - Course should include at least one rebelay, one knot pass, and one J-Hang/U-Hang
- Perform test of descent device after any changeover
- Tie 3/8 randomly selected knots
- No mistakes or reattempts during checkoff

8.2. Written Test:

Written test includes advanced SRT techniques, proper caving practices, and vertical caving safety considerations. Members must score 100% to receive credit.

9. In-Cave Procedures

9.1. Safety Precautions:

9.1.1. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE):

All members must wear appropriate personal protective equipment when participating in vertical activities. PPE includes helmets, harnesses, gloves, full pants and sleeves, and closed-toe shoes. Members must have two other participants check their vertical gear before any use of the Frog System.

9.1.2. Environmental Considerations:

Respecting the cave's delicate environment is a caver's first priority. Members must avoid touching or damaging cave formations, disturbing wildlife, or leaving any trace behind.

9.1.3. Rigging:

Use reliable and thoroughly tested anchor points for all ropes and safety lines. Always back up anchor points with secondary safety measures, such as redundant anchor systems, safety lines or hand lines. Install safety lines during critical passages to prevent falls and provide assistance. Reference the Vertical Caving SOP for detailed protocol.

10. Post-Cave Procedures

10.1. Gear Decon and Inspection

All gear should be cleaned as soon as possible to prevent WNS spread and furthering overall gear depreciation. Regular inspection of each individual device should be performed to gauge quality.

11. SOP Review

Periodic review and update of this Standard Operating Procedure should be performed by the Grotto's Safety Officer and subsequent committees to incorporate new practices. Consult advancements in cave safety recommendations from the NSS and local caving standards.

By adhering to this extensive SOP, we prioritize the safety of the Aggie Grotto with the goal of minimizing the risks associated with vertical caving. Ensuring proper education, review, and knowledge of safety, communication and cooperation will assist in an enjoyable and secure caving experience.

II. Advanced Vertical Training

Advanced Vertical Course Instructions Jenna Crabtree 2/25/24

Ascent Route:

1. Rebalay
 - a. Clip into rebalay knot with cowstail
 - b. Switch hand ascender to the next rope
 - c. Switch croll to the next rope
 - d. Unclip cowstail from knot
2. Knot Pass
 - a. Clip cowstail into butterfly knot loop that is sticking out horizontally from the body of the rope
 - b. Move hand ascender above knot
 - c. Move croll above knot
 - d. Unlip cowstail from butterfly knot
3. Redirect
 - a. Clip cowstail into redirect carabiner
 - b. Unclip redirect carabiner from the rope
 - c. Ascend 1-3 ft - do not tension your cowstail

- d. Clip redirect carabiner into the rope below you
- e. Unclip your cowstail
- 4. U-Hang
 - a. Thread microrack into the u-hang rope - pointing towards the knot you are leaving (point A)
 - b. Step off your croll and attach it to the u-hang rope - point towards the knot you are moving to (point B)
 - c. Test your rack
 - d. Take off your hand ascender and place it pointing towards Point B - making sure it is *above* your croll
 - e. Pull all the slack through your ascending system as you can
 - f. Begin to descend on your microrack making sure you stay completely off of the ground
 - g. Hard tie off your microrack
 - h. Repeat steps D-F (minus C) until almost directly or directly under Point B
 - i. Unthread your microrack leaving you on your ascension system
 - j. Ascend the rope until you reach the rebalay
- 5. Rebalay
 - a. Clip cowstail into the knot of the rebalay
 - b. Thread microrack as close to the knot as you can on the new descending rope
 - c. Unclip croll
 - d. Test rack
 - e. Unclip from cowstail
 - f. Undo hand ascender
 - g. Descend on the microrack until you are on the ground

Descent Route:

- 1. Rebalay
 - a. Clip into rebalay knot with cowstail
 - b. Thread microrack on u-hang rope as close to the knot as possible - pointing towards the knot you are leaving (Point A)
 - c. Step off croll
 - d. Test microrack
- 2. U-Hang

- a. Clip croll into u-hang - pointing towards the knot you are going towards (Point B)
 - b. Unclip cowstail from rebaly knot
 - c. Move hand ascender to the u-hang rope moving towards Point B above your croll
 - d. Pull all the slack through your ascension system as you can
 - e. Descend on your micro-rack keeping enough distance from you and the ground so that you do not touch
 - f. Hard tie off your microrack
 - g. Repeat steps D-F until you are directly or nearly directly under Point B
 - h. Unthread your microrack leaving you completely on your ascent system
3. Switching Ropes on Descent
 - a. Thread your micro-rack as high as you can on the rope you are moving towards
 - b. Step off of your croll
 - c. Test your microrack
 - d. Remove your hand ascender
4. Redirect
 - a. Arrest yourself on your microrack using tension on your breakhand
 - b. Clip your cowtail into the redirect carabiner with your non break hand
 - c. Remove redirect carabiner from the descent rope and clip it above your microrack with your non break hand
 - d. Remove the cowtail from the from the redirect carabiner with your non break hand
5. Knot Pass
 - a. Descend directly into the knot with your carabiner
 - b. Place your hand ascender on the rope
 - c. Step into your croll placed above the microrack
 - d. Unthread the microrack
 - e. Downclimb to the knot
 - f. Clip your cowstail into the butterfly knot
 - g. Step off your croll and place it below the knot
 - h. Downclimb enough to give space for your hand ascender beneath the knot and above your croll
 - i. Unclip your cowstail from the knot
6. Rebalay Downclimbing

- a. Downclimb until you are parallel with the rebalay knot
 - b. Clip cowstail into rebalay knot
 - c. Thread microrack on the new descent rope as close to the rebalay knot as you can
 - d. Step off your croll
 - e. Test rack
 - f. Undo hand ascender
 - g. Descend until you reach the ground
7. Rebalay Micro-rack Descent
- a. Move to Knot Pass point f and resume from there
 - b. Thread your rack as close beneath the knot as you can
 - c. Step off your croll
 - d. Test your rack
 - e. Remove cowstail
 - f. Remove hand ascender
 - g. Descend into the belly of the rebalay
 - h. Clip cowstail 1 (long) into knot of the rebalay
 - i. Clip cowstail 2 (short) into the belly of the rebalay
 - j. Unthread microrack
 - k. Rethread microrack on the new descent rope as close to the knot as possible - weighting your cowstail
 - l. Test rack
 - m. Unclip cowstails
 - n. Descent until you reach the ground

Considerations for the course

- 1. For the checkoff you must
 - a. Complete the ascent and descent routes under 30 minutes
 - b. Flawlessly perform a tensionless rig
 - c. At all times have two safety points on the rope
 - d. Cannot touch the ground during the u-hang
 - e. Can have messups but must figure them out on their own safely, without the help of the instructor

To become a vertical trainer

- III. Complete basic and advanced vertical
- IV. Must have taught basic vertical before
- V. Shadow AV trainings
 - A. One first time training
 - B. One *middle* training

- C. One check-off
- VI. Be able to tie
 - A. Water knot
 - B. Figure 8 on a bite
 - C. Figure 8 follow through
 - D. Alpine butterfly
 - E. Double fisherman's knot/barrell knot
 - F. Tensionless rig
- VII. Demonstrate full understanding of basic and advanced vertical techniques, knots, and have a broad understanding of how to work through rope problems in a safe manner
- VIII. Vertical Caving SOP

Vertical Caving SOP
Created: March 20,2024 J.Crabtree
Edited:

- I. The Purpose of this document is to establish a baseline of consistent and reliably safe procedures when vertical caving. This is a living document and should be updated as we learn of safer practices, caving advances, and have real life knowledge to apply.
- II. These positions if applicable should always be filled by trip leaders or senior members during a vertical caving trip. If there are not enough proper people to complete the positions the objective, members, and cave should be reviewed for feasibility.
 - A. The Pitmaster
 - 1. This person is the main person in charge during the duration of the vertical cave trip. They have the radio on the surface and are in charge of relaying information to the bottom of the drop. This person is responsible for ensuring proper use of the handline, ensuring gear is properly worn, supervising the use of the descent device, promoting use of proper pit terminology (on rope, rope free, etc.), and overall in charge of overseeing each member safely drop the pit.
 - B. The Flightmaster
 - 1. This person is located at the bottom of the pit. This person has the second radio and is in charge of keeping good communication with the pitmaster. Once the person descending is half way down the pit the Flightmaster is now in charge of them. In the majority of the cases the Flightmaster will be providing a belay for added safety in the pit. The Flightmaster ensures that members stay out of the fall zone and promotes the use of proper pit terminology (on rope, rope free, etc.).
 - C. The Eagle
 - 1. This person is needed when rope pads are used and the Pitmaster does not have immediate unobstructed line of sight on the rope pad. This person should be positioned so that they have a visual on the rope pad at

all times. If necessary, this person should be tied into webbing with an overhand on a bite or on their frog system attached to a handline so that they may maintain visual eye contact with the rope pad. This person will communicate directly to the pitmaster about the status of the rope pad. If necessary, this person will have the third radio.

D. The Checker

1. This person is in charge of checking off people's vertical kits prior to dropping, ensuring that members have the proper gear in their bags before dropping, and assists the Pitmaster, Flightmaster, and Eagle with anything they may need.

III. Rigging

- A. Rigging of any cave should be done by the two most knowledgeable members present. These guidelines should be followed on all applicable rigs.
- B. Rigging should be visually confirmed by no less than two people prior to people getting on rope.
- C. Hand Lines should be used in any place that holds risk for falling, slipping, or stumbling into the pit.
- D. Only locking carabiners/mallions should be used for rigging with redirects being the exception.

E. Natural Anchors

1. Primary and secondary anchors should always be utilized when using natural anchors.
2. A water knot is the only authorized knot used in webbing.
3. A basket hitch or wrap three pull two is an appropriate anchor when utilizing webbing.
4. A tensionless rig (figure eight follow-through with three wraps around the tree) is the preferred method for the secondary anchor with utilization of webbing being the preferred method for the primary anchor.
5. Rope pads should be placed along any point along which the rope may rub any surface.
6. Any connections (rope to webbing) should be completed with the use of two locking carabiners in opposite and opposing positions or a mallion.

F. Bolts

1. Each bolt should be inspected for tightness and wear prior to use. If two bolts are present a double figure eight on a bight should be utilized. If one bolt is present a figure eight on a bight should be utilized.
2. If applicable primary and secondary anchors should be utilized.
3. Any connection (rope to bolt) should be completed with the use of two locking carabiners in opposite and opposing positions or a singular mallion.

G. Knots

1. The use of the following knots are authorized when rigging for the Aggie Grotto. There are a plethora of knots available to use when rigging but these are the most familiar to our members allowing them to

double-check each other's work, easily identify mistakes, and fix rigging if necessary.

- a) Figure Eight Follow Through
- b) Figure Eight on a Bight
- c) Double Figure Eight on a Bight
- d) Water Knot
- e) Barrel/Fisherman's Knot
- f) Double Fisherman's Bend with Overhand Safeties
- g) Alpine Butterfly Knot
- h) Overhand on a Bight

H. Rope Pads

1. Only *official* rope pads may be used in rigging by the Aggie Grotto.
2. Carpets, T-shirts, etc. are not authorized materials for rope pads.

IV. Miscellaneous Considerations

- A. Radios should be present at each vertical caving trip.
- B. A minimum of one extra rope, rope pads, webbing, two carabiners/mallion, and medical kit should be present for each vertical caving trip.
- C. All of the gear will be brought to the entrance of the cave/pit and staged there.
- D. Trip leaders will leave their vertical kit on for the duration of the trip until every member is off rope and the trip is completed.
- E. No member should get on rope with the knowledge that they are missing a piece of gear including Harness, Chest Ascender, Hand Ascender, Croll, Cowstails, and Microrack.
- F. No member should pass any knot, rebalay, redirect, J-hang, U-hang, or any other advanced vertical caving obstacle without a complete vertical set including Harness, Chest Ascender, Hand Ascender, Croll, Cowstails, and Microrack.
- G. Trip Leaders or senior members should be the one to make rig adjustments, rope pad adjustments, or the like. Junior members should be on hand to assist and learn.