# Maquoketa Caves State Park

## Visitor Preparation Guide

*What to Wear • What to Bring • Food & Water*

## What to Wear

### Footwear

- **Sturdy, closed-toe hiking boots** — mandatory. Several trails involve steep, slippery slopes (especially after rain), creek crossings, and rocky cave floors.
- **Waterproof boots** are strongly recommended if exploring wet caves like Rainy Day Cave or Dancehall Cave, where a stream runs through the passage.
- Avoid sandals, flip-flops, or smooth-soled shoes entirely.

### Clothing

- **Wear clothes you don't mind ruining.** Belly-crawling caves like Hernando's Hideaway, Wye Cave, and Steel Gate Passage will leave you muddy and scraped.
- **Long pants and long sleeves** protect your knees, shins, and arms in tight passages — the guide literally warns "watch your shins" in Shinbone Cave.
- **Avoid white or light-colored clothing** — specifically called out for Dancehall Cave where mud and stream water are unavoidable.
- **Dress in layers:** Ice Cave is noticeably colder than outside air even on warm days, while hiking between caves can work up a real sweat.

## What to Bring

### Lighting — Non-Negotiable

- **A headlamp for every person** — hands-free light is essential for crawling caves.
- **Multiple backup flashlights.** The Steel Gate Passage guide explicitly requires this, but it is good practice in every cave.
- *Even in Dancehall Cave* (which has electric lights), a flashlight helps you see speleothems clearly.

### Protective Gear

- **Kneepads** — highly recommended for Match Cave and any belly-crawling caves.
- **Gloves** — helpful for scrambling up steep hillsides and rocky cave entrances.
- **A helmet or hat** to protect your head in low-clearance passages.

### Safety & Comfort

- **A caving/hiking buddy** — the guide stresses never entering caves alone, especially Steel Gate Passage and Bat Passage.
- **First aid kit** — steep, slippery terrain and tight cave passages mean bumps and scrapes happen.

- Sunscreen and bug spray for the trails between caves.
- **A small backpack** to keep your hands free on climbs and crawls.

# 💧 Water & 🍔 Food

## Water

- **Bring your own water** — plan on at least 1–2 liters per person for a half-day visit, more in warm weather. Active caving is surprisingly physical.
- Raccoon Creek runs through the park but is not a drinking water source.
- The park has picnic shelters near the clifftop, which suggests basic park facilities may be nearby — but confirm water fountain availability before your visit.

## Food

- **Pack your own snacks and lunch.** The park has picnic shelter areas — a great spot for a packed lunch between cave explorations.
- There are no food vendors within the park itself.
- **The town of Maquoketa** is nearby and has restaurants and grocery stores for stocking up before or after your visit.

# ⚠ Quick Reminders

- **Cave with a partner** at all times.
- **Dancehall Cave lights are seasonal** (roughly 9 a.m. to dusk, warmer months only) — bring your own light regardless.
- **Bats hibernate in Dancehall Cave** in fall and winter; lights are turned off during this period, so plan accordingly.
- **Leave no trace** — do not take rocks or speleothems as souvenirs. Wide Mouth Cave was once full of beautiful formations before visitors stripped it bare.

*Source: Maquoketa Caves State Park History Guide • Enjoy your adventure!*