

# Cavenauts return to Earth

September 21 2012

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Cave wonderland.

The international team of astronauts taking part in ESA's caving adventure have returned to Earth after spending six days underground. The voyage to the surface of our planet took them five hours from basecamp.

[CAVES](#) gives astronauts a taste of working as a safe and effective team during long spaceflights. In particular, they can hone their leadership and group skills while working in a typical multicultural team found on the

## International Space Station.

Course designer Loredana Bessone explains the similarities of caving and working in space: "The 'cavenauts' have to adapt to a completely new environment. Working and living underground is both physically and mentally demanding."

Space protocols were used in the course: "Cavewalking is similar to a [spacewalk](#). You have to pay continuous attention to the correct use of tools and safety protocols, to the progression path and to obstacles, which correspond to No Touch Zones and Keep Out Zones on the Space Station."

CAVES is the first behavioural course to involve astronauts from all partners of the [International Space Station](#). Astronauts from USA, Japan, Canada, Russia and Denmark participated this year.

Apart from exploring and surveying parts of the caves, the astronauts also conducted speleological research: cave meteorology, geology, biology and microbiology.



Nikolai ascending to the surface.

They set traps and collected [specimens](#) of underground life, which have now been forwarded to specialists for further analysis.

This year the astronauts explored further than the CAVES 2011 team and discovered what [NASA](#) astronaut Mike Fincke described as an underground "wonderland."

ESA astronaut Andreas Mogensen is very positive about the course: "CAVES is perhaps the most physically demanding [astronaut training](#) that I have taken part in, and perhaps also the most rewarding.

"To complete the training, our crew had to work together effectively and efficiently as a team, which we did.

"All in all, it was a fantastic and unique experience."

Provided by European Space Agency

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