

Dirty Dave's Long Kneepads

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If there is one piece of gear no caver, at least no Kentucky caver, can take for granted, it's his/her kneepads. Kneepads are essential to a cheery caving trip, especially since many of the caves visited by WUSS are fairly low in height and require a good deal of hands and knees crawling. Kneepads afford a variety of functions while underground, including protection of the knees and possible shins, providing a no slip surface for climbing, increasing stability while walking, and even supplying a comfy pad for sitting on cold, wet rocks during long survey trips. With all these uses, it is no wonder why we cavers take our kneepads very seriously. Kneepads come in a variety of shapes, sizes, and costs ranging from inexpensive, "volleyball" and "rollerblading" styles to sixty dollar, caver designed, full knee and shin covering models. Now I am not here to debate which manufacturer is best nor which model is the one you should buy; these are questions you yourself should test and answer. Rather, I simply want to offer you the humble opinion and experience of a caver who spends the majority of his weekends on his hands and knees and enjoys it!

Like so many other first time cavers, my first kneepads were of the "volleyball" variety. They were thick, bulky, and after a few minutes, were cutting off circulation in my legs. In short, they were rubbish! It was soon after that I learned of the, then popular, kneepads known simply as "Bombers." With this new



Figure 1: The Dirty Dave's Long Knee Pads come in three different sizes and a few colors including red and black.

found knowledge I purchased a pair and lived in total crawling happiness. Bomber Gear, the company responsible for "Bombers" specialized in making equipment for kayakers and other extreme water sports; this was both good and bad. What made the "Bombers" so absolutely fantastic was the high impact foam that covered from above the knee all the way down to the ankle, coupled with the three strap closure. They were extremely comfortable to wear and crawl on, but since they were not designed for cavers they were not indestructible. In their original form, they lasted two years. Sometime during that two year period, Bomber Gear stopped selling the kneepads, disappointing the entire caving community. Like so many other cavers, I scrambled to find a new pair or a suitable replacement for my beloved "Bombers". Alas after three long years I may have actually found something just as good, if not better.

Long crawls can be punishing on your knees and shins; happily the gear manufacturers have heard our cries of pain. There are now a couple of manufacturers making the long variety of knee pads that were popularized by Bomber Gear. However due to the high demand from cavers, the relatively small supply, and the customized requirements of cavers, these knee pads are fairly expensive. The cheapest of the three readily available is the Gonzo Guano Gear Behemoth Knee Armor, which retails for about \$40, while the most expensive is the, new to the market, Crawladdies at \$60. How-



Figure 2: Here you can see the placement of the long knee pad as well as the three straps used to secure it to your leg.
Photo by K. M. Kissell.



Figure 3: A close up of the strap and loop closure which does a great job of holding the pad in place on your leg.
Photo by K. M. Kissell.



Figure 4: A size comparison photo of the Bomber Gear knee pads (green) and the newer Dirty Dave's (black). The "Bombers" have recently been refinished with new fabric yet I still choose the Dirty Dave's as my knee pads of choice. Photo by K. M. Kissell.

ever, for my replacement "Bombers" I chose the Dirty Dave's Long Knee Pads, which sell for \$50; now let me tell you why.

The Dirty Dave's pads will be very familiar to any former "Bombers" owners. The basic size, shape, and thickness is the same, as well as the three straps used to secure them to your legs. However, the closure system and strap construction varies. Instead of an elastic strap like that of the Bomber Gear variety, the Dirty Dave's use a non elastic piece of nylon fabric with Velcro on one side. To secure the pads you simply pass the strap through a loop on the other side of the pad and double it back onto itself. While this method does not have the double Velcro closure of the "Bombers," it does seem to work very well. In the two years I have caved with the Dirty Dave's pads I have yet to have an instance where the Velcro has come undone. Since the strap is not elastic, it makes the pads infinitely adjustable, meaning that you can tighten the pads as needed. This is helpful on long crawls when pads tend to loosen up and in preventing pads from sliding around and off your knee. However, unlike the "Bombers," you cannot remove the actual pad from the fabric, like you would want to for cleaning. The original "Bombers" had a Velcro

closure on top that allowed for pad removal. This is not the case for the Dirty Dave's, although it is very easy to modify them and install the Velcro closure, something that I would highly recommend. The outer material of the Dirty Dave's is quite durable and there do not seem to be as many seams, which is good since a seam constitutes a weak point in the construction. The Dirty Dave's pads come in three sizes, providing availability for a wide range of cavers and the pad inside is made of medical grade foam so crawling on the pads is an absolute joy.

In short, whether you are looking for your first pair of serious knee pads or for a replacement for your demolished "Bombers," the Dirty Dave's Long Knee Pads may be for you. I certainly enjoy the time I spend on my knees in a cave and that is solely thanks to the Dirty Dave's pads. They are durable, maintainable, and function as advertised. I actually like them more than my recently repaired "Bombers" and I find myself choosing my Dirty Dave's over my "Bombers" every time. While the Dirty Dave's Long Knee Pads will cause your wallet to decrease faintly in weight, your knees and shins will thank you in the long run, oops-I mean long crawl!