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PRESS RELEASE

Kents Cavern is Venue for Emergency Services Major Disaster Planning Exercise

Over 100 emergency services personnel will be involved in a Major Disaster Planning Exercise at Kents Cavern on 13th January 2009 – named “Exercise Bedrock”. This will prove vital in testing the contingency plans of the emergency services in the event of a major incident at any of the numerous underground locations across Devon and Cornwall, from caves to mines and other industrial sites.

Personnel from Devon and Cornwall Police, Devon and Somerset Fire & Rescue Service, and Devon Cave Rescue Organisation will all be involved in the exercise.

“We will be mocking up a partial cave collapse with a dozen or so casualties, some with very serious injuries,” said Police Sergeant Mike Rose, Joint Director of Operations for Exercise Bedrock. “We are trying to make this as realistic as possible, having drafted in drama students from Cornwall College to play the accident victims, and we’ll be setting up a small emergency mortuary on site to test procedures. Holding this exercise at Kents Cavern gives us a rare opportunity to practise our major disaster plans for an underground incident in a realistic environment – vitally important given the number of underground environments in the South West.”

“We are delighted that the emergency services have chosen to carry out this Emergency Services exercise here at Kents Cavern,” said James Hull, Kents Cavern’s Operations Manager. “My staff are all very familiar with the cave but its going to be fascinating to see how we all react to this simulated emergency incident. I’m sure we’ll learn a great deal.”

Nick Powe, owner of Kents Cavern, said: “Over the last 8 years, nearly £1m has been invested in the attraction and we have seen visitors to Kents Cavern increase by nearly 30%. In 2008 we were awarded Best Large Visitor Attraction in South West England. The health and safety of our staff and visitors is our number one priority, so when I was offered the chance of hosting such a large scale exercise at the cavern I didn’t hesitate. This is a great opportunity for both the Emergency Services and my staff to gain valuable practical experience which no doubt will serve us all well. For us this can only enhance the value of what we offer our visitors.”

Kents Cavern is a Scheduled Ancient Monument, giving it the highest level of protection in the country. It is a nationally important archaeological site and a Site of Special Scientific Interest, and this exercise is being carried out within the Show Cave area, the area of the cave normally open to the public, and without any impact on this statutory protection.

Exercise Bedrock is taking place during Kents Cavern’s annual two week closure between 12th and 23rd January when the cave annually undergoes its routine maintenance. The exercise is not open to the general public but there will be plenty of activity in Wellswood on Tuesday as emergency services vehicles make their way to Kents Cavern. The emergency services will be controlling traffic flows to minimise disruption along the Ilsham Road.

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Notes to News/Picture Desk

- 1) For further information and interview or photography/filming requests at Kents Cavern, please contact Carl Smith , Marketing Manager at Kents Cavern on (01803) 215136, mobile 0775 9216139 or e-mail: carlsmith@kents-cavern.co.uk