

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Explorers Arrested in Saint Paul, Released

"Odd people who mean no harm"

Saint Paul, MN 30 December 2003 - Six men were arrested shortly before 2 am Sunday morning near the historic Landmark Brewery on Saint Paul's west side. According to friends, the six are part of a close-knit subculture called Urban Exploration, whose members profess fascination with exploring and photographing the hidden, and often off-limits, sides of the urban landscape. The six were released early Tuesday morning after exhaustive questioning, and could potentially face charges of felony burglary, possession of burglary tools, as well as the commission of crimes for the benefit of a gang.

The incident is believed to be the single largest arrest among Minnesota's flourishing Urban Exploration community. While none of the six were available for comment, others in the community decried the arrests and two-day incarceration, saying that, although explorers often trespass, they operate by a rigid code of conduct and take pains to cause no damage and leave no sign of their presence at locations they explore. If convicted, the six could face a decade or more behind bars for their inquisitiveness. Said "Ben", an explorer acquainted with those arrested, "Most explorers are good, and talking to one for a few hours would prove that to anyone. Odd and quirky, but still the good guys." Saint Paul police would not comment on the arrests Monday night.

Explorers, adventurers, drainers, cavers, or vadders, these men and women of many names are quick to deny being criminals, insisting that trespassing is a "victimless" crime which shouldn't warrant the attention - or the plethora of charges - that those caught often face. The authorities, naturally, take a very different view, and are often quick to associate explorers with graffiti "taggers" and bored suburban youth looking for places to vandalise. One suggested solution - that adventurers take active steps to educate law enforcement about their "harmless" hobby and attempt to present it in a favorable light - is quickly dismissed by most explorers. "I'd go into the police station," said an anonymous explorer, "and there's no way I'd get past 'Hi, I like to explore drains and steam tunnels' before they had me in handcuffs. No way." The few proponents of this approach argue that proactively educating the police will have measurable long-term benefits for all parties involved, but for now, the hobby, rightly or wrongly, remains just another criminal activity to most officers. Many explorers, in turn, accept that, as Ben says, "Police response to our hobby is not only inevitable, but required. The onus is on the explorer to not be noticed, not on the police to discern odd people who mean no harm from normal people who mean great harm. In these times, the police would be negligent if they did not rigorously defend the infrastructure of our civilization."

Although people have been interested in caves, steam tunnels, sewers and abandoned buildings much longer, the first truly organized group of such individuals in Minnesota seems to have formed at the University of Minnesota's Twin Cities campus in the mid-1990's. Led by the charismatic, charming and often outspoken Max Action, the "Action Squad" remains Minnesota's largest and most visible exploration group, constantly pushing the boundaries of Minnesota exploration and maintaining a regular media presence. Max denied any connection to the arrested explorers, and expressed his sympathies to the families of those caught, some of whom waited more than twenty-four hours before receiving word that their missing loved ones were safe, albeit in custody.

As for whether Sunday's arrest would curtail future adventures, those arrested have sworn off future exploration, until, as a friend put it, "the siren's call of the unknown drags them back." One explorer expressed worry over the perceived "high probability of police action against explorers", but most are adopting a cautious, wait-and-see attitude.

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