OUTDOOR RECREATION CENTRE
• VICTORIA INC •

Abseiling
Adventure Activity Standard (AAS)
Guidelines for Dependent Groups

(Version 3.1 • August 2010)

Guidelines for organisations and leaders conducting abseiling for commercial and non-commercial dependent groups

Contents

1   Introduction

The Victorian Adventure Activity Standards (AAS) have been developed to assist organisations and leaders to plan and safely undertake outdoor adventure activities with dependent participants. The AAS should be used in the preparation of the organisation's risk management program.

Participants may already have a degree of skill and experience in the particular adventure activity and so be less dependent upon the leader for guidance and instruction. In these situations the AAS should be adapted to reflect the experience of group members and the particular circumstances of the adventure activity.

Regardless of the extent to which the AAS are adapted, each organisation, and leader has a duty of care to the participants to have completed a risk analysis of the activity and developed strategies to address possible risks.

The AAS have been prepared with the involvement of a wide cross-section of Victoria's outdoor industry, and reflect commonly accepted practices for planning and undertaking outdoor adventure activities with inexperienced and dependent participants.

1.1   Applying the Adventure Activity Standards

The likelihood of injury and loss can be minimised by having suitable risk management programs in place and applying the advice provided in the AAS to suit the particular circumstances of the activity or organisation. Organisations may use the AAS to demonstrate that the delivery of an activity meets commonly accepted industry practices.

AAS are voluntary guidelines for undertaking adventure activities in a manner that:

•   promotes safety for both participants and providers

•   provides assistance for providers against legal liability claims and criminal penalties

•   provides assistance in obtaining insurance cover.

While the AAS are NOT statutory standards imposed by law, some agencies/organisations may make application of the AAS mandatory (for example Crown land licences for trade or business insurers).

1.2   Legal aspects

The ORC web site www.outdoorsvic.org.au has general additional information about:

•   the basis of legal liability

•   claims in contract

•   claims in negligence

•   defences against claims by participants

•   Good Samaritans, volunteers, apologies

•   limitation on claims for personal injury damages.

However all organisations should obtain their own legal advice.

1.3   Review of AAS

The AAS are not fixed documents. They are reviewed periodically in the light of changing knowledge or practices. New equipment or technology, changing understanding of the environment, reports of incidents or near misses in Australia or overseas are possible triggers for a review of an AAS.

2   Activity description

Abseiling (also known as rappelling) involves descending vertical (or near vertical) features, both natural and man made (such as portable walls, fixed towers and bridges) using ropes and descending (friction) devices.

This AAS is for the independent activity of abseiling and not necessarily for the abseiling conducted by a rock climber to descend after a climb, although clearly the abseiling AAS does have some relevance to the scenario of a climber. In the majority of situations, abseiling involves descending by walking or 'bouncing' backwards.

Some groups undertake forward-facing (Geneva or rundowns) descents and where this is the case, the leader must consider the added risks. It must also be considered that standard harnesses are NOT designed to have an attachment on the back so specialist equipment is required for forward-facing descents.

AAS are written specifically for formal groups (commercial and non-commercial organisations) undertaking organised activities and are intended to provide guidance towards satisfying the legal obligations inherent in delivering such activities. For this reason it is important to ensure that each leader or organisation interprets the AAS for the specific group, area or location and duration of each activity.

3   Planning

In any adventure activity planning is essential in order to achieve objectives, have fun and to minimise the inherent risks to participants. There are many acceptable ways to plan an activity and AAS recognises that each group will approach this differently. This section is intended to provide a framework for planning activities to minimise the risks to participants.

3.1   Activity plan

An activity plan should be prepared for all activities. Each organisation must determine if the plan needs to be documented. The following is a list of factors that should be addressed prior to any activity:

People

- objectives of the activity (desired outcomes) and participant expectations
- duration of activity
- age, experience, fitness, skill level, disposition, and known medical conditions of participants
- size of group
- standard of care (education, commercial or community organisation)
- leader to participant ratio.

The leader(s) selected for the activity must have the required skills, experience and competency to conduct the activity, effectively manage incidents and satisfy the planned objectives.

At least one leader should be suitably familiar with the area being visited (the level of familiarity will vary according to the objectives and circumstances of the group.)

Leaders must have passed the Working With Children Check if independently supervising participants under 18 years of age (see www.justice.vic.gov.au/workingwithchildren for requirements and exemptions).

Equipment

- group equipment including first aid and communication equipment
- personal equipment including clothing, food and dietary requirements, and personal medication
- availability of specific activity equipment for participants
- condition and suitability of all equipment
- support/evacuation resources (vehicle, local bus company, etc.) and availability and access of emergency medical assistance (e.g. air ambulance flight times, SES, etc.).

Physical Environment

- area and route selection and intended route
- availability and suitability of maps and other area specific information
- ability of site to withstand visitation with minimal impact
- terrain (route characteristics) and associated implications including remoteness and access
- land managers requirements (access restrictions, group sizes, permit requirements, booking requirements)
- seasonal factors (snow, fire, availability of drinking water, tides, river levels, track conditions, other users)
- expected weather conditions and implications (hypothermia, hyperthermia).

Other factors to be considered include:

- surface type & suitability (natural/artificial, granite, sandstone etc.)
- site characteristics (difficulty, height, pitch, overhangs)
- access to top, bottom and ascent routes
- methods for managing group at all times (including participants before and after participation).

Guidance Note

The activity plan should take into account the possible impact of severe weather on the safe conduct of the activity. The Guidance Note 'Management of Outdoor Activities for Severe Weather Conditions' provides information and commonly agreed procedures for planning and responding to severe weather in the outdoors that involve led activities with dependent participants in Victoria. The Guidance Note is available from the ORC website www.outdoorsvic.org.au

Guidance Note

General

Factors that may cause an activity to be cancelled, modified or postponed include, but are not limited to, forecasted or current adverse weather conditions, insufficient equipment, restrictions dictated by the land manager and environmental factors (flood, drought, fire).

3.2   Pre-activity documentation

There are certain details that a leader and/or organisation must document to maximise safety.

The following information must be documented, taken on the activity and a copy must be made available to a non-participating contact:

- activity plan (At least a route plan explaining from where to where, how long it should take and expected hazards)
- emergency strategy
- name, address and emergency contact details for all participants and staff
- any medical conditions of participants, including teachers and supervisors, that are likely to affect performance. For example asthma (details of management plan including medication), diabetes, epilepsy, fainting/dizziness, specific allergic reactions, blood conditions which may affect bleeding/ blood clotting, conditions affecting balance, recent or long-standing injuries (e.g. back, knee, ankle), disability or other relevant medical conditions (e.g. pregnancy, repetitive strain injury (RSI), heart and any relevant medication. Throughout the activity, the leader must take reasonable steps to manage any known specific participant medical requirements
- after a full explanation/briefing participants should be asked to sign an acknowledgement of the inherent risks involved in the specific activity
- the signature of a parent/guardian for participants under the age of 18 authorising participation.

3.3   Competencies

To lead activities a leader must be confident of having the skills and experience at least equivalent to that described by the following Units of Competency. A leader can acquire these skills and experience through training with community organisations such as clubs, via employers, TAFE colleges, universities, registered training organisations (RTOs), in-house training and by attaining international qualifications.

Details of these Units of Competency can be found at the National Training Information Service website at www.ntis.gov.au. NTIS is the official national register of information on Training Packages, Qualifications, Courses, Units of Competency and Registered Training Organisations (RTOs). See also Service Skills Australia www.serviceskills.com.au These competencies are used to describe the skills required to undertake a specific role within the outdoor industry.

In non-commercial activities participants are often peers/club members with known experience/skills. Where this is the case, the leader may not require all of the skills listed below but may prefer to delegate some aspects to other members of the group. The group needs to assess the list of skills described below and ensure that the relevant skills are available within the group for the particular activity.

A statement of attainment for these units is not required but the inclusion of this section is intended to provide a suitable benchmark describing the skills that leaders should have, although not all of the skills listed below will be applicable on all activities. It is recommended that leaders keep a diary record of activities they participate in and/or are responsible for as relevant experience is also extremely important.

Abseiling at artificial sites and abseiling at natural sites are treated separately in the national training package. In the case of abseiling, the functions have been defined according to the following format, which also provides an indication of the sequence in which the required competencies would normally be achieved.

	GENERIC	**UNIT CODE**
These units relate to the generic competency expected of any individual in a position of Leadership or Management in the outdoors.	**Leadership and Management Skills**	
	Respond to emergency situations	SRXEMR001A
	See the First aid section in this AAS	
	Facilitate a group	SRXGRO001A
	Deal with conflict	SRXGRO002A
	Undertake risk analysis of activities	SRXRIK001A
	Apply sport & recreation law	SRXINU002A
	Follow defined Occupational Health and Safety policy and procedures	SRXOHS001B
	Manage risk in an outdoor activity	SROODR006A
	Plan for minimal environmental impact	SROOPS002B
These additional skills may be required when the activity is more complex, conditions more variable,	**Outdoor Recreation Skills**	
	Provide leadership to groups	SRXGRO003A
	Plan outdoor recreation activities (advanced)	SROODR003A

	GENERIC	UNIT CODE
location is more remote, etc.	Guide outdoor recreation sessions	SROODR005A
	Apply weather information	SROOPS003B
	Coordinate emergency response	SROEMR002A
	Operate communications systems and equipment	PUAOPEO02A
	Navigate in tracked or easy untracked areas	SRONAV001B
	Navigate in difficult or trackless areas	SRONAV002B
	Use and maintain a temporary or overnight site	SROOPS006B
	Apply search and rescue skills	SROOPS005B

Artificial surfaces

Guide (single pitch) surfaces ➡ Instructor (single pitch) ➡ Instructor (Multi-pitch

Natural surfaces

Guide (single pitch) surfaces ➡ Instructor (single pitch) ➡ Instructor (Multi-pitch

➡ Guide (multi pitch)

ARTIFICIAL SURFACES

Single Pitch Abseiling guide (Artificial Surfaces)

Competent to work autonomously within a defined range of skilled operations. These should involve known routines, methods and procedures, where minimal discretion and judgement is required in the selection of equipment, services or contingency measures and within known time constraints.

May work within clearly defined contexts conducting single pitch abseiling activities acting according to clearly defined Standard Operating Procedures and relevant documented guidelines.

Persons with this level of competence may only conduct single pitch abseiling activities at an artificial abseiling site.

Perform vertical rescues	SROVTR001A
Abseiling specific skills	
Apply single pitch abseiling skills on artificial surfaces	SROABA002A
Establish ropes for abseiling on artificial surfaces	SROABA003A
Guide abseiling on artificial surfaces (single pitch)	SROABA005A

Single Pitch Abseiling Instructor (Artificial Surfaces)

Competent to work autonomously within a defined range of skilled operations. These should involve known routines, methods and procedures, where some discretion and judgement is required in the selection of equipment, services or contingency measures and within known time constraints.

May work within clearly defined contexts instructing single pitch abseiling skills and techniques according to clearly defined Standard Operating Procedures and relevant documented guidelines.

Persons with this level of competence may only instruct single pitch abseiling activities at an artificial abseiling site.

Persons with this level of competence may also work as an assistant with a more experienced leader in potentially non-routine or more complex activities and programs (e.g. in multi-pitch situations).

A single pitch abseiling instructor requires single pitch abseiling guide

competencies PLUS:

Train Small Groups	BSZ404A
Instruct Abseiling on artificial surfaces (single pitch)	SROABA006A

Multi Pitch Abseiling Instructor (Artificial Surfaces)

A person designated as a Multi Pitch Abseiling Instructor (Artificial Surfaces) within the National Outdoor Leader Registration Scheme has the competencies to instruct clients in order that they may acquire abseiling skills or abseil guiding skills to enable independent operation.

A person with this level of competence may instruct clients to achieve the following outcomes:

- Abseiling participant (single pitch)

- Abseiling participant (multi pitch)

- Single pitch abseiling guide.

A multi pitch abseiling instructor requires single pitch abseiling instructor

competencies PLUS:

Establish ropes for multi pitch abseiling on artificial surfaces	SROABA004A
Instruct abseiling on artificial surfaces (multi pitch)	SROABA007A
Perform complex vertical rescues	SROVTR002A

NATURAL SURFACES

Single Pitch Abseiling guide (Natural Surfaces)

Competent to enable them to work autonomously within a defined range of skilled operations. These should involve known routines, methods and procedures, where some discretion and judgement is required in the selection of equipment, services or contingency measures and within known time constraints.

May work within clearly defined contexts conducting single pitch abseiling activities acting according to clearly defined Standard Operating Procedures and relevant documented guidelines. Persons with this level of competence may only work at sites which:

- Provide the opportunity for single pitch abseiling;

- Have natural and/or fixed anchors;

- Have been deemed as appropriate abseiling sites by a person with competencies equivalent to a multi-pitch abseiling guide. (This analysis of suitability may result in the establishment of a recognised local abseiling site, or sites assessed and used by specific organisations).

A person with the level of competence defined as the minimum for a single pitch abseiling guide does not have the ability to adequately assess the suitability of a new abseiling site and its anchors.

Persons with this level of competence may also work as an assistant with a more experienced leader in potentially non-routine or more complex activities and programs (e.g. in multi-pitch situations).

Perform vertical rescues	SROVTR001A
Abseiling specific skills	
Apply single pitch abseiling skills on natural surfaces	SROABN003A
Establish ropes for single pitch abseiling on natural surfaces	SROABN004A
Guide abseiling on natural surfaces (single pitch)	SROABN007A

Single Pitch Abseiling Instructor (Natural Surfaces)

A person designated as a Single Pitch Abseiling Instructor (Natural Surfaces has the competencies that enable them to operate within a broad range of varied contexts that may be complex and non-routine. Leadership and guidance are involved when organising activities of self and others, as well as contributing to technical solutions of a non-routine or contingency nature.

A person with this level of competence may perform a broad range of skilled applications. These may include the evaluation and analysis of current practices, development of new criteria and procedures for performing current practices and provision of some leadership and guidance to others in the application and planning of the skills.

Single pitch abseiling instructors may work independently at a broad range of venues with a variety of different client groups. Persons with this level of competency have the ability to deal with complex,

unpredictable and non-routine situations. Persons with this level of competence may only work at sites which:

- • Provide the opportunity for single pitch abseiling;
- • Have natural and/or fixed anchors;
- • Have been deemed as appropriate abseiling sites by a person with competencies equivalent to a multi-pitch abseiling guide or instructor. (This analysis of suitability may result in the establishment of a recognised local abseiling site, or sites assessed and used by specific organisations).

Persons with this level of competence may also work as an assistant with a more experienced leader in potentially non-routine or more complex activities and programs (e.g. in multi-pitch situations).

A single pitch abseiling instructor requires single pitch abseiling guide

competencies PLUS:

Instruct Abseiling on natural surfaces (single pitch)	SROABN008A

Multi pitch abseiling guide (Natural Surfaces)

Competent to operate within a broad range of varied contexts that may be complex and non-routine.

Leadership and guidance are involved when organising activities of self and others, as well as contributing to technical solutions of a non-routine or contingency nature.

A person with this level of competence may perform a broad range of skilled applications. These may include the

evaluation and analysis of current practices, development of new criteria and procedures for performing current practices and provision of some leadership and guidance to others in the application and planning of the skills.

Multi-pitch abseiling guides may work independently at a broad range of venues with a variety of different client groups. Persons with this level of competency have the ability to deal with complex, unpredictable and non-routine situations. Persons with this level of competence may work at sites which:

- Have natural, fixed or artificial anchors

- Are multi pitch;

- Have the potential to provide non-routine situations(e.g. adverse weather conditions, complex rescue situations).

A multi pitch abseiling guide requires single pitch abseiling guide competencies

PLUS:

Apply multi pitch abseiling skills on natural surfaces	SROABN005A
Establish ropes for multi pitch abseiling on natural surfaces	SROABN006A
Guide abseiling on natural surfaces (multi pitch)	SROABN009A
Perform complex vertical rescues	SROVTR002A

Multi Pitch Abseiling Instructor (Natural Surfaces)

A person designated as a Multi pitch Abseiling Instructor (Natural Surfaces) has the competencies to instruct clients in order that they may acquire abseiling skills or abseiling guiding skills to enable independent operation.

A person with this level of competence may instruct clients to achieve the following outcomes.

- Abseiling participant (single pitch)

- Abseiling participant (multi pitch)

- Single pitch abseiling guide

- Multi pitch abseiling guide

A multi pitch abseiling instructor requires single pitch abseiling instructor competencies PLUS:

Perform complex vertical rescues	SROVTR002A
Apply multi pitch abseiling on natural surfaces (multi pitch)	SROABN005A
Establish ropes for multi pitch abseiling on natural surfaces	SROABN006A
Instruct abseiling on natural surfaces (multi pitch)	SROABN010A

3.4   First aid

To lead any activity a leader of a group (or a delegated other) must have a level of first aid training that is relevant to the situation. The factors that determine the level of first aid training and support include:

• the size of the group

• the age of the group

• the remoteness of the activity

• the ease with which the emergency services can be contacted; this may depend on the remoteness of the activity and the type of communication equipment available

• the likely time for emergency services to reach the injured person

• the nature and severity of likely injuries.

A common approach is given below. The time limits are guidelines only and the leader needs to make a judgement, based on the circumstances of each activity, about the level of first aid training required. The codes refer to the Health Training Package available from www.ntis.gov.au

Urban: This applies in parks and urban areas supported by a professional (not volunteer) ambulance service. Distance from road heads should be at no time more than 15 minutes.

No formal first aid qualification may be necessary but a leader should at least be able to care for someone who is unconscious or who is choking, treat for shock, manage severe bleeding and provide CPR**.** After consideration of such factors listed above it may be judged that first aid training equivalent to HLTFA201A (Provide Basic Emergency Life Support) is necessary.

Standard: This applies to any situation where access to professional medical care is less than 1 hour.

It is recommended that leaders have a level of first aid training equivalent to HLTFA301B (Apply First Aid). After consideration of such factors listed above it may be judged necessary to increase this to HLTFA402B (Apply Advanced First Aid).

Remote: This applies to any situation where access to professional medical care is greater than 1 hour.

It is recommended that leaders have a level of first aid training equivalent to HLTFA302A (Provide First Aid in Remote Situation). After consideration of such factors listed above it may be judged necessary to include additional training to the level of HLTFA402B (Apply Advanced First Aid).

More information:

Ambulance Victoria (www.ambulance.vic.gov.au/Main-home/First-Aid.html)

Red Cross (Victoria) (www.redcross.org.au/vic/)

Royal Life Saving (Victoria) (www.lifesavingvictoria.com.au/)

St Johns Ambulance (Victoria) (www.sjaa.com.au/)

Wilderness Medicine Institute (www.wmi.net.au/wmi/)

On activities for participants with disabilities, for multi day activities and/or walks in remote areas, more specialised first aid knowledge may be required.

Other organisations such as clubs/community groups have a responsibility to manage likely incidents requiring first aid. Where such a group cannot ensure that one group member has adequate first aid ability then it is essential that participants understand this and, where possible, other measures are put in place to manage the risk of injury or illness.

Although the nature of the activity allows for the first aid person to be other than the leader. It is recommended that the leader does hold a current and recognised first aid certificate equivalent to that described above.

At multi pitch sites it is recommended that the each leader hold the above first aid certificate and have access to an appropriate first aid kit for each pitch.

3.5   Risk management

Risk is inherent in all outdoor activities and the AAS can help manage that risk. However it is not possible to eliminate all risk and the leader and organisation need to accept that some risk remains and they should ensure that it is managed according to recognised methods.

Risk management is a series of 'well-defined steps which, taken in sequence, support better decision making by contributing a greater insight into risks and their impacts' (Australian Standard AS/NZS 4360 Risk Management).

The five step approach is

Step 1: Identify all hazards

Step 2: Assess and prioritise the risks these hazards create, deal with highest priority risk first

Step 3: Decide on measures to control the risks (e.g. eliminate the risk, substitute a venue, use personal protective equipment)

Step 4: Implement appropriate control measures

Step 5: Monitor the control measures and review the process.

More detail about the steps involved in risk management can be obtained from the ORC web site or from a general web search.

The identification of risks could be considered under the headings of 'people', 'equipment' and 'environment'. Examples of risks associated with 'people' could be the lack of necessary skills or inadequate fitness. Risks associated with 'equipment' could include inadequate clothing for the area, and insufficient or incorrect equipment. Risks associated with 'environment' could include adverse or unseasonal weather, sudden changes in river levels or high winds.

For the activity being undertaken and the group involved, foreseeable risks should be noted and strategies should be developed to avoid or minimise these risks. The strategies should be included in the activity plan.

Some activities and some organisations (such as clubs and commercial operators) may have established risk management guidelines which should be used.

3.6   Emergency strategy

An emergency strategy must be devised from the risk assessment to manage foreseeable incidents and minimise their escalation. This strategy should be documented.

Activity leader(s) and a non-participating contact must be aware of the emergency strategy and have a copy of it.

The emergency strategy for an activity must be specific to each activity and will contain:

•   emergency access and emergency escape routes (where possible)

•   assembly points where appropriate

•   emergency contact details for key organisations (land manager and police) and how they are best contacted (mobile phone, satellite phone, radio)

•   planned start and finish time of the activity

•   the emergency trigger time for the non-participating contact to inform emergency services (on failure of group to

return/check-in)
- specific communication being carried by group
- relevant aspects of the land manager's emergency strategy
- strategies adopted peculiar to specific areas being visited (e.g. the rock scramble or river crossings)
- a strategy for maintaining supervision ratios should any changes to the planned activity eventuate (adverse conditions, injured leader, participant(s) pull out of activity).
- The activity leader must communicate with the relevant non-participating contact at designated time(s). If this does not happen, the non-participating contact must commence the agreed steps of the emergency strategy which would ultimately lead to the police being notified. There may be certain trigger times for various stages of the emergency strategy to be implemented.

A summary of the emergency strategy must be provided as a component of the pre-activity briefing.

Where more than one site is used at a location the emergency strategy must reflect the requirements for each site.

3.7   Restrictions to participation

Participants may be excluded or removed from an activity (or an activity may be modified) at any time prior to departure at the leader's discretion. This may also be done during the activity if safe to do so.

Participants may be excluded for reasons that include (but are not limited to) being under the influence of alcohol or drugs (including prescription drugs which may affect performance), being unable or unwilling to follow instructions, lacking suitable equipment, having an inadequate level of fitness, physical ability and experience for the particular activity.

Operational restrictions to an abseiling session include weather and restrictions as advised by the land manager or otherwise (including drought, fire, seasonal closure of sites). The session may also be cancelled should the leader become aware of any issue regarding the integrity of the site.

3.8   Pre-activity briefing

It is essential that all information is accurately disseminated to potential participants in adequate time for an informed decision to be made about their participation.

Groups and organisations may have their own preference for how the pre-activity briefing will be delivered and the method may depend on the length and complexity of an activity. The briefing should be delivered in a way that ensures that all participants are aware of the following:
- identity and role of activity leader(s)
- an outline of the activity plan and objectives
- the nature of the activity and its inherent risks
- essential equipment and clothing
- correct use and/or fit of equipment
- recommendations on the type of food, the amount of food and water required and the availability of water
- strategies for conservation including protection of flora and fauna, rubbish removal and sanitation
- a summary of the emergency plan or sufficient information to allow participants to act appropriately in the event of an incident or emergency, including methods of emergency communication
- explanation of what is expected of participants and the participant's responsibility to act as requested (conduct etc.)
- restrictions to participation
- agreed methods of communication within the group (signals and calls) devised before the activity commences
- final check that all documentation is completed and submitted.

Leaders should receive acknowledgment that participants have understood the content of the briefing

Leaders must offer participant the opportunity to voice any concerns.

Other factors include:
- group management throughout activity
- explanation of how the session will be managed (procedures and calls).

3.9   Ratios

The ratio of participants to leaders is determined by a number of factors. In some circumstances the leader may judge that a smaller number of participants per leader/assistant leader is necessary. The leader should consider the supervision ratio based upon the:
- experience of the leader

- expected capabilities of participants (experience, competence, fitness, etc.)
- conditions (environment, remoteness, weather)
- land manager's requirements
- planned duration of the activity
- remoteness of the activity
- suitability and availability of equipment.

Land managers or relevant authorities may also suggest ratios that differ from AAS and where these are within AAS (fewer participants per leader) they must be regarded as minimum requirements.

The total group size at any one site should not exceed 20 without the land manager's approval.

The following apply as a minimum ratio of leader(s) to participants in various scenarios:

Single pitch top belay system

For any abseil utilising a top belay system with beginner/novice abseilers, there must be one leader to each abseiling participant (1:1).

Where participants have provided documentation/verbal evidence supported by a visual check the leader may deem participants to be competent belayers. They may then be permitted to belay with a backup belayer. Where this is the case the leader may supervise 2 independent descents/ropes with one competent belayer to each participant (1:6).

If leading a group alone the leader must ensure that at least one participant is aware of and understands what action must be taken according to the emergency strategy in the event that the leader becomes injured or incapacitated.

Single pitch bottom belay system

For any abseil utilising a bottom belay system with beginner/novice abseilers, there must be one leader at the top (dispatching) and one competent participant or leader at the bottom (bottom belayer or brake person) for each loaded rope (ie with an abseiler on the rope) (2:1)

The competent person in the role of braking must have provided documentation/verbal evidence supported by a visual check before the leader can deem them to be competent belayers.

Multi pitch

Multi pitch abseils are those for which the participants are required to be anchored at changeovers. Where a changeover occurs at an area considered to be large/safe and which has easy escape from the ledge, this is considered by AAS to be multiple single pitch abseils.

For multi pitch abseils there must be 2 leaders to every six-abseiling participants (2:6). These abseils must be managed carefully to prevent overcrowding at the changeover and to ensure that the anchors are sufficient.

It is recommended that participants for multi pitch abseils have had some prior experience:

- extra care must be taken to ensure constant and clear communication, appropriate supervision and suitable site/route selection.
- the leader must remain at the site of the activity at all times during the activity session.

3.10 Group size

Group size is an essential component of group management. Maximum and minimum group size must be carefully decided based upon the following:

- the safety of the group and individuals
- the objectives of the activity
- specific restrictions imposed by the land manager (e.g. Parks Victoria)
- expected environmental impact of the activity
- experience of the leader and participants
- the potential impact of other users
- conditions (environment, remoteness, weather)
- equipment available.

Where a large group is split into a number of smaller groups each resultant group must have its own leader and independently adhere to AAS.

Waiting participants

The leader of the abseil session must ensure that all waiting participants remain in a designated safe area and are appropriately supervised by a responsible adult. (Adult participants may be expected to be responsible for themselves).

The given ratios apply only to participants in the process of abseiling. Additional participants waiting or in transit during the session must be supervised independently.

4   Leader roles

In the AAS leaders, assistant leaders and other roles are defined by skill levels, not by titles. The skill levels are described in the section on competencies. Some activities may refer to 'guide', 'supervisor', 'manager', 'whip' or 'instructor' because the terminology has been used in the activity for many years. The actual title of a person in a particular activity is irrelevant. Regardless of the terminology, there must be an individual who has the responsibility of 'leader' and is in charge of the conduct of the activity. There may also be other people (one or more) who are assistants to the leader.

4.1   Leader

The leader of the activity will

- have the skills and experience to carry out the activity plan

- be responsible for delegating tasks to assistant leader(s)

- be responsible for conducting the activity on-the-ground without external supervision

- have activity skills as well as group management skills.

4.2   Assistant leader

The assistant leader of the activity will generally not be required to have the same skill level as the leader but will:

- have skills specific to the conduct of the activity

- be able to undertake activity-specific tasks delegated by the leader

- be able to manage the safety of the group, including in an emergency, if the leader is incapacitated.

An assistant leader would normally be included in the leader ratio.

A teacher without these skills may be responsible for the welfare and supervision of students but would not be considered an assistant leader nor included in the ratio.

A teacher with these skills may be an assistant leader and be included in the leader ratio.

There may be a number of assistant leaders with responsibility to the leader.

4.3   Other leader roles

In some large organisations the leader may be appointed by an activity manager who:

- is responsible for selecting staff with the necessary skills and experience

- is responsible for appointing leaders and assistant leaders – in large groups there may be more than one leader for an activity

- is responsible for ensuring the activity plan is properly completed

- will not necessarily take part in the activity.

4.4   Specific responsibilities of the leader

In addition to actual leading the group, the leader has a range of responsibilities for the duration of the activity including:

- take reasonable steps to ensure that the level of knowledge, ability, skill and equipment of each participant is adequate for the level of difficulty and complexity of the activity

- ensure that a process has been undertaken to research and plan for likely hazards, and that the leader is familiar with the measures required

- introduce themselves as leader and introduce any other key people

- ensure that minimal environmental impact message is conveyed and adhered to

- manage and minimise the impact to the environment that may be caused by the activity

- where considered necessary nominate an assistant leader (or assistant leaders) who has/have known skills and experience relevant to the activity and are willing to perform defined duties

- ensure a briefing is conducted and understood by all participants

- undertake headcount before, during and immediately following the activity

- maintain awareness of the physical and psychological condition of the group

- control the pace of the group

- delegate responsibility to other group members as necessary (whip, navigation, first aid, etc.)

- notify relevant people of safe completion of the activity

- ensure that any incidents are managed, reported and recorded

- manage the group to avoid or minimise the effects of hazards
- ensure land manager's requirements are followed
- confirm the activity plan
- ensure that the group has access to safe drinking water
- check suitability, condition and use of all group equipment prior to departure and on return
- ensure group equipment is secured and stored correctly at all times
- ensure to the best of their ability that group members do not get into situations beyond their capabilities
- check first aid kit equipment prior to activity
- check communication equipment prior to activity
- frequently check weather forecasts prior to the activity and, if possible and relevant, during the activity
- ensure all documentation has been completed and collated
- arrange for the signing of waivers where these apply.

Individual tasks may be delegated but the responsibility remains with the activity leader.

Participants are responsible for their own actions both in relation to obvious risks that may be encountered and also in following the directions/instruction of the leader on any activity.

4.5   Specific responsibilities of the assistant leaders

If an assistant to the leader is appointed, they must be familiar with the requirements of the activity in order to be able to assume an effective assistant leader role including undertaking activity-specific tasks delegated by the leader, and being able to safely manage the group, including in an emergency, if the leader is incapacitated.

Any assistant or persons assisting the leader in the provision of an abseiling session must provide documented, visual and/or verbal evidence of learning and/or competency for the role, which they are required to undertake. (spotting, belaying etc.)

5   Equipment

Equipment requirements vary with the objectives of the activity plan and the environmental conditions likely to be encountered. When planning equipment requirements for a session it is important to consider all possible eventualities.

5.1   Group equipment

None specified

5.2   Participant's equipment

The following equipment requirements apply to all dependent participants:

- helmet specifically designed for rock climbing/abseiling and which adheres to UIAA, CE or equivalent must be worn throughout the activity session
- harness specifically manufactured for rock climbing/abseiling and which adheres to UIAA, CE or equivalent must be used
- clothing appropriate to the requirements of the site and weather conditions
- any personal medication must be carried and the leader(s) must understand the requirement
- appropriate footwear must be worn both to access the site (where relevant) and for the session
- an appropriate and established descending device must be used
- it is recommended that gloves are worn by all participants during the abseil.

5.3   Leader's equipment

The following equipment requirements apply to all leaders conducting dependent group abseiling activities:

- helmet(s) which adhere to UIAA, CE or equivalent for climbing and abseiling activities must be worn through out the session
- harness specifically manufactured for rock climbing/abseiling and which adheres to UIAA, CE or equivalent must be used
- ropes smaller than UIAA single ropes should be used as double ropes (twin rope abseil system)
- ropes and all protective equipment (karabiners, slings and chocks) must be manufactured specifically for rock climbing/abseiling and used according to the manufacturers specifications and accepted practice. (For example static ropes)

- an additional rope, equivalent to the longest pitch should be accessible for rescue, should it be required
- a rescue pack of pulleys, ascenders, and a belay device should be accessible for rescue, should it be required
- emergency communication equipment (Mobile phone, radio, PLB if in remote area etc.)
- a first aid kit appropriate for the level of first aid training held.

5.4   Storage and maintenance

All equipment used in abseiling activities must be used, maintained and stored according to manufacturers specifications where applicable.

All equipment used must be checked before and after each activity session.

It is recommended that all issued equipment be carefully washed and/or disinfected after each activity where relevant. (Helmets, shoes, clothing etc.) All harnesses must be supplied in a clean and serviceable condition.

AAS consider it essential that a log of use and maintenance be kept for all equipment issued and stored by an organisation.

6   Minimal impact

The leader and organising body should be satisfied that participants are aware of their responsibilities as members of the group in respect to the environment and the community by following principles of minimal impact practices.

Parks Victoria has a 'Camping Code' to help you minimise your impact regardless of the type of camping or activity you undertake. See it at www.parkweb.vic.gov.au/1process_details.cfm?note=19

The following recommendations draw on the principles of Leave No Trace Australia www.lnt.org.au.

6.1   Travel and camping

- Stay on track.
- Stay on durable surfaces, which include established tracks, rock, gravel and dry grasses.
- Do not create new tracks.
- Always walk on the track even if wet and muddy, on narrow paths walk in single file as much as possible to avoid widening it (with the exception of Phytophthora areas where one should avoid mud).
- Do not disturb vegetation as this will encourage erosion and promote the spread of pest plant species.
- Avoid revegetation areas altogether.
- Find out about local vegetation to learn about those that are fragile and those that are resilient.
- Try to unload gear and take breaks on large flat rocks or other durable ground to avoid damaging vegetation.
- In natural areas spread out and walk carefully to avoid trampling.
- Avoid steep areas that are more prone to erosion once disturbed.
- Use established campsites. Take care not to create new ones. Otherwise camp on rock, sands, or gravel where impact is smallest. When these can't be found, then on areas with durable grasses or weeds.
- Actively manage the group at the site to minimise trampling and damage to the surrounding vegetation. (The leader might choose to educate the group and select tent sites for them.).
- Keep campsites small. Focus activity in areas where vegetation is absent.
- Good campsites are found, not made. Altering a site is not necessary.
- Avoid digging, landscaping and trenching around tents.
- When leaving a campsite, "naturalise it". Fluff up flattened grasses, brush away boot prints and replace any rocks that have been kicked or moved.
- Avoid damaging live shrubs, woody plants or branches.
- Protect water sources by camping at least 100 metres from rivers and billabongs.
- Keep the group size small.
- Disperse use to prevent the creation of campsites and tracks.
- Choose durable surfaces for tents and cooking areas.
- Avoid places where impacts are just starting to appear.
- Stay only one night.

6.2   Disposal of waste

- Pack and carry out all packaging rubbish and leftover food including organics in sturdy bags.
- Inspect the campsite and rest areas for rubbish and spilled food before leaving.

- Do not burn rubbish.
- Be careful not to drop rubbish while walking on tracks.
- When available, use established toilet facilities.
- In other situations, carry a trowel and deposit solid human waste in shallow holes dug in topsoil – usually 10-15 centimetres deep and at least 100 metres from water, camp and tracks. If toilet paper use is necessary, use it sparingly and bury it deeply or preferably, carry it out. Cover and disguise the hole when finished. (In water catchment areas, human waste should be carried out.)
- Urinate on bare ground away from vegetation, routes and tracks.
- Pack out all hygiene products in a suitable container.
- For personal washing or dishes, carry water 100 metres from streams and pools. Avoid using any soaps or detergents; if they must be used, use only small amounts of biodegradable soaps and detergents. Scatter strained dishwater.
- Hand sanitisers are a good alternative for personal hygiene.
- All campsites must be located at least 20 metres from any waterway.

6.3 Do not disturb

Preserve Nature/Respect Culture

- It is illegal to excavate, disturb or remove archaeological, historical and cultural artefacts from any public or wilderness lands.
- Avoid bushwalking close to Indigenous sites out of respect for the culture and to ensure their longevity. Land managers can advise on these locations. Seek appropriate permission.
- Do not touch rock art, which can be damaged by the natural oils from human skin.
- Preserve the past: observe but do not touch cultural or historic structures and artefacts.
- Avoid bushwalking in areas where rare and vulnerable plants or animals are found. Land managers can advise you of these locations.
- Leave rocks, plants and other natural objects as they are.
- Do not build structures, furniture or dig trenches.

Introduced Species

- Avoid spreading non-native plant and animal species that are generally impossible to eradicate once they are introduced. Do not transport flowers, weeds, wood or aquatic plants into or out of the wilderness.
- Avoid spreading diseases like Giardia (a human bacterial parasite causing chronic diarrhoea) or Cryptosporidium (a single-celled organism that can cause gastro-intestinal illness with diarrhoea in humans) by properly disposing of human waste at least 100 metres from water.
- Know non-native species and report sightings of them to appropriate sources.
- Do not travel through Quarantine Areas.
- If a trip crosses areas known to contain pathogens (bacteria or viruses), visit the un-infected area first.
- Avoid transporting mud in boots, equipment and tyre treads which may contain Phytophthora (dieback fungal spores) by washing thoroughly before and after travelling. Use wash stations immediately where provided.
- Check clothing and all gear and burn or dispose of all hitchhiker type seeds before and after travelling in different areas.
- Help landowners and managers initiate control efforts by alerting them to infested areas.

6.4 Fire impact

- Fires can cause devastating and lasting impacts to the bush.
- Check area regulations for fire bans. No fire (including a fuel stove) may be lit on a day of Total Fire Ban.
- Total Fire Bans may be implemented regionally so be sure to check daily and be aware of fire regions that cover the route.
- If a Total Fire Ban has been declared, consider cancelling your trip to the area for safety reasons.
- Leaders MUST know applicable fire regulations in advance of the trip, as fire regulations are the LAW.
- Contact your local fire authority or local land manager for details regarding your local responsibility.
- Preferably use a lightweight fuel stove for cooking and enjoy a candle or gas lantern for light. Consider using candles standing in sturdy clear plastic bags or containers for light instead of fire (non-drip church candles are recommended). Don't leave wax residue.
- Avoid lighting an open fire (even if permitted).

- Where fires are permitted, use established fire rings, fire pans, or mound fires. Dismantle and naturalise any extra fire rings.
- Do not dig fire-pits.
- Judge the wind, weather, location and wood availability.
- Do not make a fire if fuel is scarce. Choose small dead pieces of wood that are found on the ground. Do not break off branches from trees or bushes.
- At least three metres around the fire must be clear of flammable vegetation.
- Keep fires to a minimum size necessary for cooking and minimise disturbance to the surrounding area.
- Manage your fire. Do not leave it unattended.
- Burn wood down to ash. Fires must be completely extinguished with water before leaving the campsite.
- Clean out campfires rings after use.
- Fires should not be used to create heat unless it is an emergency. Carry enough warm clothing so that fires for warmth are unnecessary.
- Be careful of improper cigarette butt disposal. Take butts with you.

6.5 Wildlife

- Observe wildlife from a distance. Do not follow or approach them.
- Understand through education the role each species plays in each environment in order to realise the importance of its position within an ecosystem.
- Avoid wildlife during sensitive times: mating, nesting, and raising young. Touching nests or young animals may cause their parents to abandon them.
- Never feed wild animals or birds. Feeding wildlife damages their health, alters natural behaviours, and exposes them to predators and other dangers. Store food and rubbish securely.
- Control pets at all times or better yet, leave them at home. All National Parks restrict pets so check regulations first.
- Report any injured animals to the local land managers. Do not attempt to handle the animal.

6.6 Consider others

- Take the responsibility to ensure that your group behaves with respect for the hosts and other users. Set out reasons and expectations early in the trip.
- Learn about the cultural history of the land. Recognise, acknowledge and respect local knowledge.
- Respect the wishes and regulations of all hosts. (e.g. Indigenous, pastoral, land managers and locals).
- Never visit places where you have not obtained permission. Seek permission and/or a permit.
- Respect others' wilderness experience by examining the group's behaviours to minimise any negative impact.
- Make reasonable efforts to minimise the impact of the group on others.
- Assist other parties in difficulty provided that this action does not adversely affect the safety of your group.
- Respect other visitors and protect the quality of their experience. Be diplomatic with other groups and other recreational users of the area.
- Be courteous. Give way to others on tracks and roads.
- Do not block paths or tracks with people or equipment. Have rest breaks in discreet places to minimise impact on other groups.
- If possible camp out of sight and sound of other visitors.
- Let everyone enjoy nature's sounds. Keep noise to a minimum. Talk quietly especially when in large groups.
- Avoid the use of bright lights, radios, electronic games, mobile phones and other intrusive urban devices.

6.7 Abseil specific

- Do not leave or add to fixed equipment any site without appropriate permission.
- Avoid using trees or other vegetation for belay points, if there is no alternative, protect them from rope damage to the best of your ability by using rope protectors or webbing.
- Always utilise recognised tracks to approach and move between descents. Where this is not possible or multiple tracks exist, take a moment to decide which track is the most appropriate and/or control the group to have minimal impact. (even if it means taking a longer way around.)
- Try to avoid steep access and ascent tracks which will be intrinsically more prone to erosion, especially with larger group activities.

- Do not disturb vegetation as you will encourage erosion and promote the spread of pest plant species.
- Where ever possible choose sites that have a rocky base and top that can tolerate groups without causing vegetation damage and erosion of the area around the abseil.
- Actively manage your group at the site to minimise trampling and damage to the surrounding vegetation.
- Choose shaded waiting areas, not only for the comfort of participants, but also to reduce the tendency for waiting participants to push back into surrounding vegetation to find shade.
- Do not block footpaths with equipment or belayers.
- Be aware of and diplomatic with other groups, individual climbers and other recreational users of the area. Do not assume you have a right to occupy certain climbs simply because you were there first. Negotiate!
- Do not brush moss or lichen from the cliff unless absolutely necessary for safety reasons.

7   Definition of terms

In the AAS the following terms are used

Organisation or activity provider

This is a commercial body (for profit) or non-commercial body (not-for-profit / community group) which undertakes to provide an activity.

Leader

This is the person who has the responsibility for the conduct of the actual activity. The leader will have a level of skill appropriate to the activity and may be supported by one or more assistant leaders.

Assistant leader

This person will be delegated tasks by the leader and will have a level of skill appropriate to those tasks.

Participants

A person whose welfare is the responsibility of leader or assistant leader and/or who participates in an activity for recreational or educational purposes but not in a leadership role.

Terminology

Some activities have specific terminology for various roles e.g. 'trip leader'. In the AAS the roles are related to the skills, not the title.

Glossary of abbreviations.

AAS - Adventure Activity Standards

ORC - Outdoor Recreation Centre Inc. Victoria

NTIS - National Training Information Service

8   Further information

Land managers such as Parks Victoria www.parkweb.vic.gov.au and Department of Sustainability and Environment www.dse.vic.gov.au/ will also have important safety and environmental information that will be important for the planning and conduct of activities.

The Outdoor Recreation Centre Victoria Inc would like to extend sincere thanks to the members of the working party who invested their own time and expertise to represent their respective organisations in support of this document (details can be obtained from the Outdoor Recreation Centre Inc.)

Version 3.1 – changes made to Section 3.1 Activity plan

Grouping of items and reference to Guidance Note 'Management of Outdoor Activities for Severe Weather Conditions'