

ACC Ottawa Guidelines - Advanced Climbing Leader

Scope

This document covers advanced climbing on both rock and ice. It provides advice on "best practices" for ACC Ottawa amateur leaders leading Section trips for sport, trad or multi-pitch climbing. It is intended to help leaders plan and manage club trips. It should be read in conjunction with the "[ACC Ottawa Guidelines - Introduction](#)". [Top rope climbing](#) is described in a separate guideline.

Introduction

Climbing trips in this category are restricted to "Intermediate and Advanced" climbers. Climber experience levels are defined in the [top rope climbing guidelines](#). The Trip Leader's assessment will determine the level participants can operate at. The Trip Leader should verify that participants are following correct procedures at the start of the climbing and follow this up with periodic oversight during the day. As always, the leader may request climbers to refrain from activities that the leader is not comfortable with or that would interfere with the intended scope of the trip.

Leader/Participant Ratio

Given that trips in this category are restricted to experienced climbers, the supervisory burden on the Trip Leader should be substantially lower than for a similar top rope climbing trip. In consultation with the Climbing Coordinator, as appropriate, the Trip Leader will exercise his or her judgement to determine a suitable leader/participant ratio for the proposed trip. Some factors to consider include:

- 1) participant experience levels
- 2) technical climbing difficulty of the targeted area and routes
- 3) proximity of the routes
- 4) whether the focus of the trip is cragging (single pitch) or multi-pitch; in the latter case, rope teams must be capable of operating with minimal supervision
- 5) the degree of remoteness of the climbing area

A "supervising climber" means the Trip Leader or a designated experienced climber. One supervising climber per four active ropes may be an appropriate ratio in a cragging situation. Multi-pitch climbing is normally done with ropes of two climbers, occasionally three, requiring at least one experienced supervising climber per rope team. Trip Leaders may, of course, apply a higher level of supervision at their discretion.

Participant Screening

Participant screening is particularly important for multi-pitch climbs. Once climbing begins, the Trip Leader's direct control over events is substantially diminished as individuals will be climbing in small, separate rope teams. Consequently, the prudent climbing leader should put as much care into trip planning and participant screening as "supervising" the actual multi-pitch climbing itself, to the extent that the latter is possible.

It is essential to match the climb to the skill and experience level of the participants. This is relatively easy to do if both the climb(s) and all participants are known to the Trip Leader. It is inadvisable to conduct difficult climbs as a club outing that the Trip Leader has not already done personally or with climbers who are not well known to the Trip Leader.

Careful participant screening is essential for safety. Do not accept any participant you don't know personally without researching their training, experience, skill level, fitness and composure. It is also advisable to keep group size small and to engage the support of one or more other experienced and trusted assistant climbing leaders.

Anchors

The Trip Leader should maintain oversight over the anchoring practices of climbing teams to ensure that anchors are solid, redundant, equalized and minimally-extending. When slinging trees, leaders should be careful to respect local rules to prevent tree damage.

Belaying

Ground anchors are strongly advised in areas with objective hazards (such as drop offs), or when there is a risk of the belayer being jerked forward and losing control of the belay, such as when there is significant weight differential between climber and belayer, or when the belay has to be established a distance away from the climb to avoid rock or ice fall.

Rappelling

A back-up Prusik should be used. It is recommended that the rappel device be extended from the harness a readily-accessible distance such that the back-up Prusik (connected to the harness and tied below the rappel device) cannot compromise the rappel device.

Supervision of the Climbing Site

- 1) The Trip Leader is responsible for the entire group. Activity supervision and participant welfare come first. The Trip Leader's personal climbing agenda comes last, if at all.
- 2) Anchors will be constructed by the Trip Leader or designated experienced climber(s).
- 3) Club policy is that helmets will always be worn in the vicinity of the climbing site and other areas deemed hazardous by the Trip Leader.

Ice Climbing

- 1) For ice climbing trips, it is at the Trip Leader's discretion whether the trip will run if temperatures fall below -15C. Appropriate precautions should be taken to guard against hypothermia and frostbite.
- 2) Following periods of thaw, ice climbing trips are inadvisable until there is a solid refreeze.
- 3) Grigri belay devices are inadvisable in winter as they may ice up and malfunction.
- 4) It is recommended that climbers and belayers wear eye protection.
- 5) Leaders are advised to establish belay stations away from potential ice fall zones, if possible.

Emergencies and Self-Reliance

Both leader and participants should be fit, self-reliant and able to deal with the worst case emergency scenario - an unscheduled bivouac taking care of an accident victim. This does not mean enough gear to go camping i.e. go lightweight but have the essentials to survive a night on the mountain (not necessarily in comfort).

Communications

Depending on the layout of the climbing area, FRS/GMRS radios can be very useful for short range (~2-3 km) contact between climbing teams and may be the only means for the Trip Leader to exercise overall coordination. It may be possible to run several multi-pitch climbs within auditory or visual contact range for oversight and mutual backup in case of difficulties.

First Aid Qualification

Either the Trip Leader or an Assistant Trip Leader should be "[AWFA-qualified](#)".

Guidelines for Advanced Climbing (Sport, Trad and Multi-Pitch) Trip Leaders

- 1) prepare for a sport, trad or multi-pitch climbing trip:
 - a) select a climbing site and routes suitable for the target group of climbers
 - b) prepare and publish a trip notice in conjunction with the Climbing Coordinator
 - c) determine an appropriate leader/participant ratio for the planned trip(see above); recruit Assistant Leaders and screen participants accordingly
 - d) advise participants on gear, clothing and supplies appropriate for the trip:
 - i) climbing equipment
 - ii) a headlamp, appropriate clothing and personal micro-first aid kit
 - iii) adequate water and high energy food and snacks for the day

- e) screen trip participants, offering constructive suggestions for alternatives to those who do not possess the necessary skills or experience
 - f) assemble appropriate club gear (ropes, anchor kits, helmets, harnesses, first aid kit) and arrange for its transportation to the climbing site and return after the trip
 - g) determine what group safety gear is appropriate (group first aid kit, tarp, insulated pad)
 - h) organize event logistics such as meeting time and place, transportation, accommodation, meals, etc.
 - i) make a note of emergency contacts for the climbing site, communication options and conceptualize how an accident would be handled
 - j) monitor weather forecasts and prepare a "Plan B", in case of unsuitable conditions
 - k) ensure all participants read and sign the trip waiver prior to the trip; pass the signed waiver to the Climbing Coordinator at the earliest opportunity
- 2) supervise a sport, trad or multi-pitch climbing site, with emphasis on safety:
- a) safely set and remove anchors and communicate these skills to others
 - b) delegate tasks to assistant trip leaders and engage other experienced climbers
 - c) monitor the climbing gear of participants for suitability and condition
 - d) brief participants on site-specific safety hazards and safety procedures
 - e) oversee and mentor participants on safe climbing practices
 - f) maintain situational awareness with respect to route availability, time of day, weather, participant energy level and attitude, etc. and be ready to change plans if appropriate
 - g) good judgement to make tough, perhaps unpopular, safety-related decisions
 - h) understand the club Emergency Response Protocol and take charge in an emergency
- 3) be knowledgeable and skilled in self rescue and partner rescue

Useful References

1. "Alpine Skills: Summer", Petzl Foundation and Alpine Club of Canada, 2013.
2. "Mountaineering: The Freedom of the Hills", The Mountaineers, Seattle, 8th Ed., 2010.
3. "Technical Handbook for Professional Mountain Guides", Association of Canadian Mountain Guides (ACMG) and American Mountain Guides Association (AMGA), 1999.
4. "Playing It Safe", Ed. Murray Toft, Alpine Club of Canada, 1998.