



RESPONSIBLE ABSEILING

This document incorporates advice from the NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service and from Bushwalking NSW.

Abseiling is an essential skill to gain access to the magnificent canyons of the Wollemi, Blue Mountains and Kanangra Boyd National Parks. These beautiful places are usually watercourses lined with cliffs, and including cascades, waterfalls, pools and lush rainforests. The length of the abseil can vary from ten meters to one hundred meters.

Abseiling is a lot of fun and may offer an experience of exhilaration, personal challenge or adrenalin rush. However, abseiling is not really a “stand alone” activity, but rather a skill that is employed in the sports of rock climbing, canyoning, caving and mountaineering, so go on and try all the rock related activities.

The word '*abseil*' is from the German *abseilen* ('to rope down'). Also known as 'rappelling' in America, it is a means by which climbers and mountaineers can safely descend from the heights they have just scaled, or to obtain access to canyons.

Abseilers need to be aware that it is an activity where serious injury or death can occur as a result of:

- Falling off a cliff.
- Falling rocks.
- Equipment dropped by others.
- Failure of anchors or equipment
- Misuse of equipment.

These risks are minimised by abseiling activities being lead by qualified persons, and by training all persons participating in an abseil activity in cliff top safety, use and care of equipment and standard calls, prior to the activity. Therefore, to become proficient in abseiling requires more than reading the information contained in a handbook. To become proficient requires undertaking a basic abseiling course in the first instance, followed by regular practice under varying conditions. The SBC regularly runs abseiling courses

For an enjoyable and safe abseiling experience, plan ahead and take the following precautions:

Preparation

- Each member of the party should have their own personal equipment - sharing is unacceptable. The leader will advise you about what equipment you should bring.

Climbers' Belaying Guidelines

- The climber must be kept on a reasonably tight belay at all times.
- Inexperienced participants should not belay inexperienced participants.
- Never take your brake hand off the rope.
- Belay in line with the anticipated direction of pull.
- Tie into an anchor.
- Stay alert and focused on the climber.

Guidelines for the Care of Ropes and Equipment

- Before using a rope, run your hands along the entire length to check that the inner part of the rope is intact and free of soft spots or other defects.
- Instruct participants to avoid treading on a rope.
- Beware of sharp or jagged rock edges and other sources of rope damage. Use a rope protector if appropriate.
- Check metalwork, prussik loops, tapes etc for signs of damage.
- After use, re-check the rope for wear, wash if necessary, dry in the shade and coil neatly before storing.
- Destroy any gear that may have had its strength compromised.

Leaders Responsibilities

- Decide minimum group equipment requirements (including emergency equipment). Consider if you have sufficient equipment available for the trip or if the scope of the trip needs to be revised.
- Carry additional prussik loops, carabinas, rope etc to facilitate an effective rescue.
- Carry spare slings to replace suspect slings.
- Advise participants to wear suitable protective clothing.
- Carry a knife for use in emergencies.
- Know, as a minimum, how to tie and the correct use for a tape knot, alpine butterfly, bowline, double fisherman's knot, prussik knot and figure eight knot.
- Be competent at choosing and setting up anchors and belays.
- Attempt to load all anchors equally.
- If possible arrange the belay point so that should an anchor fail that the other anchor is not shock loaded.
- When abseiling using two ropes, make absolutely sure that the end to be pulled to retrieve the ropes is clearly marked and remembered, (eg by putting a distinctive knot in it.)
- Know rope rescue procedures.
- Ensure all participants know the call "ROCK!"
- Where appropriate ropes should have a knot tied in the end to prevent accidentally abseiling off the end.
- Instruct inexperienced participants on the dangers of a fall whilst getting onto or off a rope.
- Instruct participants in the use of clear and agreed communication signals.
- Where appropriate set temporary belays at the top of pitches to aid in getting onto the main rope.
- Double check each other's harness, buckles and all knots before climbing or before committing to the rope.
- Ensure the first and last person to abseil has the equipment and the ability to prussik.
- Ensure that long hair, loose clothing, straps etc are tied back whilst abseiling.
- Bottom belay abseilers where this is possible and where the belayer is safe from rock falls.

More Information

- Read the SBC document - *Responsible Canyoning*.