



## Module 1 – Introduction

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## 1 What is Abseiling / History (All Levels)

Abseiling is the technique of sliding down a rope at a safe speed. During the descent the application of controlled friction determines the speed of descent. Controlling the friction on the rope can be done two ways, by using the body wrap method or the much safer way of using one of the many mechanical friction devices such as a Figure 8 descender.

Many rock climbers consider Abseiling or Rappelling as the cheat's way out of a climb and not to be done. But at the same time in the early 1950's many cavers were looking for alternative methods apart from using ladders and lowering systems to enter deep caves or pits. One caver decided to Abseil in and Prusik out of the cave because he could not get enough people together to use the standard lowering system. Eventually this system became more and more common and was developed even further by cavers and rock climbers, so the term "Single Rope Techniques" was coined by an Australian, Neil Montgomery in 1977. Many of these techniques have now been adopted by many rescue units right round the world. Since the mid 1970's there have been no major revolutionary breakthroughs developed in regards to equipment or techniques. However, much has been done in the refinement of rope technology, harness comfort and space age alloys that have enhanced the fabrication of all climbing equipment.

Abseiling can be defined into two categories:

- **Abseiling** Descending carefully without bounding or jumping, with the aim of slowly walking down to the base of the descent. eg. Being belayed after a climb.
- **Sports Abseiling** Descending rapidly, with the aim of being able to increase the confidence of the student. Victorian Branch Abseiling Council teaches these techniques.

### 1.1 Scope

These notes detail the suggested safety instructions to be observed during abseiling activities.

### 1.2 Limitations

- A. Danger is inherent to this sport. An Abseiler's ability depends on their own balance, judgement, strength, knowledge and trust in the equipment. Good balance will conserve strength and can make a descent a lot of fun.
- B. Meticulous attention to detail, such as checking equipment and a gradual progression of training should minimise accidents and injuries.
- C. The safety instructions are neither intended as, nor can they be, a substitute for foresight, prudence and common sense in the planning and execution of this activity.

### 1.3 Definitions

Definitions are listed in the section 'Glossary', which should be read and understood before studying the rest of these notes.

## 2 Eligibility for participation (All Levels)

All who are aged between 8 and 65 years (with exceptions pursuant to the policy for public displays) of age are able to participate in abseiling, provided they are physically



capable of undertaking of the activity.

## 2.1 Physical fitness

Abseiling is a moderately strenuous activity, so both the leader and student should be suitably fit.

## 3 Training phases (All Levels)

In any activity there are different standards or phases, which students must progress through. This activity has different progressive phases to enable students to assimilate the skills that they are being taught. The three basic phases are as follows:

Phase 1	Introduction - Usually a straight face or tower.
Phase 2	Basic - A cliff face with variable gradients.
Phase 3	Night - To be conducted under strict supervision with an Abseiling Leader on line.

Figure 1 Phases of Training

These phases' limits are further limited based on the different groups of students:

8 to 11 years	Limited to Man-Made towers at a maximum height of 15 metres.
11 to 14 years	Limited to a maximum height of 50 metres for phases 1 and 2 only.
14 to 18 years	Limited to a maximum height of 100 metres for phases 1,2 and 3.
18 years & over	Limited to a maximum height of 200 metres and multi-pitch for all, phases, but is dependant on the experience of the Abseiler. Requests to participate in scout-based descents of over 200 metres must be assessed by the VBAC prior to the jump.

Figure 2 Age Based Limitations

## 4 Weather / Environment

Consider the weather conditions at the jump site before the activity begins and consider any weather forecast. Site controllers should identify signs of approaching bad weather and should consider the wind chill factor (Refer to wind-chill chart following). But remember cold weather isn't the only conditions to watch out for. On very hot days being out in the open can cause other problems, such as Heat Exhaustion and Dehydration. Watch for people who are feeling hot, exhausted, and weak or have a general feeling of being unwell. Remember that the best cure is prevention.

As most Abseiling is done on remote sites in National parks and bush areas, the Site Controller must be aware of, and alert to, the possibility of bushfires. During high fire danger periods or dry spells the Site Controller should have a plan ready should it become necessary to evacuate the site. This plan should include an exit route and alternative route and an assembly point clear of any hazard.

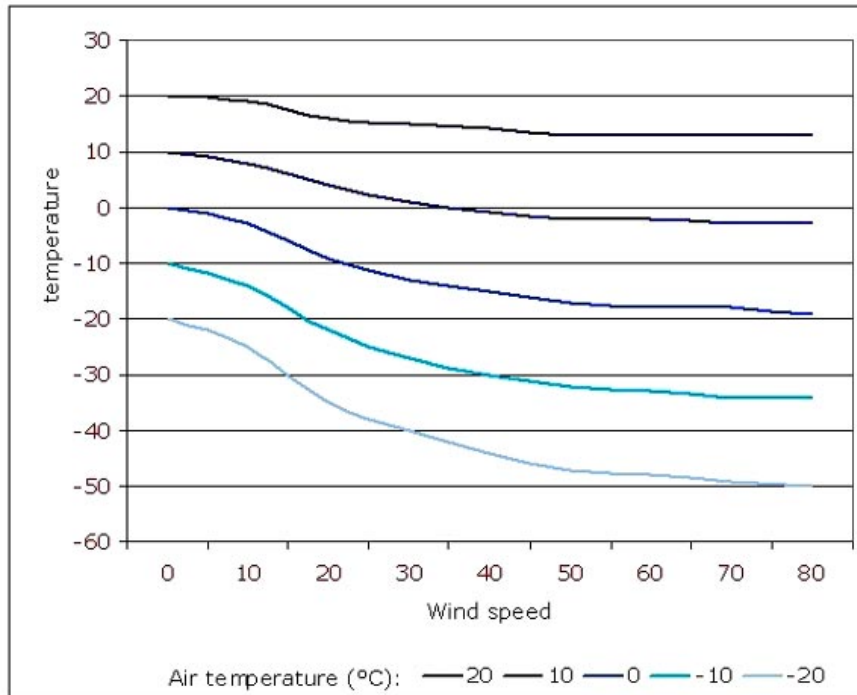


Figure 3 Graphical Wind Chill

		Wind Speed (kph)								
		0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80
Air Temperature	20	20	19	16	15	14	13	13	13	13
	15	15	13	10	8	7	6	5	5	5
	10	10	8	4	1	-1	-2	-2	-3	-3
	5	5	2	-3	-6	-8	-9	-10	-11	-11
	0	0	-3	-9	-13	-15	-17	-18	-18	-19
	-5	-5	-8	-15	-20	-22	-24	-25	-26	-27
	-10	-10	-14	-22	-27	-30	-32	-33	-34	-34
	-15	-15	-19	-28	-34	-37	-39	-41	-42	-42
	-20	-20	-25	-35	-40	-44	-47	-48	-49	-50
	-25	-25	-30	-41	-47	-51	-54	-56	-57	-58
	-30	-30	-36	-47	-54	-59	-62	-64	-65	-66
	-35	-35	-41	-54	-61	-66	-69	-71	-73	-73
	-40	-40	-47	-60	-68	-73	-77	-79	-81	-81
-45	-45	-52	-66	-75	-81	-84	-87	-88	-89	
-50	-50	-58	-73	-82	-88	-92	-94	-96	-97	

Figure 4 Wind Chill Factor Chart



## **5 Duty of care** (All Levels / Partial)

The following are guidelines to assist all leaders to meet their Duty of care as prudent leaders:

- Plan the activity thoroughly.
- Consult the experts for advice and local knowledge on all aspects of the activity.
- Assign qualified personnel to conduct and supervise the activity.
- Conduct the activity in a safe area having regard to the capabilities and experience of the participants.
- Use appropriate transport and approved equipment.
- Obtain necessary permits and consents from relevant authorities, landowners, employers, parents, etc; and notify authorities (eg Police, Ambulance, Department of Sustainability (NRE) etc.) of the proposed activity, location, duration and size of the group.
- Know the health status of each member of the group.
- Obtain medical approval from parents or guardians where a member of the group has a medical condition that may require treatment or where the member has suffered a serious illness or injury.
- Conduct a pre activity briefing for Leaders, Participants and Parents/Guardians.
- Inspect all group and participants' equipment.
- Arrange medical or first aid procedures in the event of injury.
- Follow accepted first aid procedures in the event of injury.
- Make arrangements for emergency situations.
- Keep accurate records of all aspects of the activity, especially accidents.
- Operate the activity in line with V.B.A.C. policy and standards.

## **6 Child Abuse / Sexual Harassment** (Guide / Activity Leader / Instructor)

One of the emerging concerns of today's society is the area of child abuse. Always ensure that there is another leader or parent to accompany you on activities. Be especially careful when harnessing students, or working as Jumpmaster. Respect their privacy and give them no reason to make any statement about you "touching them". Remember to remain in sight of other Leaders and not to be out of hearing of them.

Another area to watch is the possible comments made by members of your group or team towards others, comments made at the wrong time can cause distress or a break in concentration thus causing loss of confidence or an accident.

Sexual Harassment is wrong and unlawful under the Sex Discrimination act (1984) and the Victorian Equal Opportunity act (1984).

For more information refer to the Scout Info Book or to Victorian Branch Headquarters.

## **7 Disciplinary committee** (All Levels)

The disciplinary committee is a board of experienced members of the Victorian Branch Abseiling Council. Who are called together to deal with Safety and Policy breaches as related to the sport of abseiling within the Scouting and Guiding Associations of Victoria. The committee will consist of the Training Officer (VBAC), the Abseiling Leader Course Manager (VBAC), and three (3) other members of the Victorian Branch Abseiling Council. The committee will meet within five (5) weeks of receipt of a written



complaint. The person who committed the alleged breach will be notified at least two (2) weeks prior to the inquiry so he / she may attend the meeting and explain their actions. Any person who is called in front of the Disciplinary Committee has the right of appeal to the Branch Activity Leader, who will be notified of the result of any committee hearing.

The Disciplinary Committee has the option of imposing cancellation or suspension of the V.B.A.C. Instructors qualification, or VBAC membership or can require the abseiling leader to undergo further training or retraining pending on the seriousness of the alleged breach.

At the completion, results will be forwarded to Scouts Australia, Victorian Branch Head Quarters.