

Avon Outdoor Activities Club Standard Operating Procedure – Outdoor Rock Climbing and Bouldering

Reviewed: 14 Mar 2022

1. Introduction

This Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) sets out the procedure for holding outdoor rock climbing and bouldering activities within Avon Outdoor Activities Club (AOAC). It also identifies the responsibilities of Participants, in order to ensure that outdoor rock climbing events are safe and enjoyable for all. This SOP does not apply to outdoor climbing or bouldering events that are not listed on the Club Calendar. These are private events and are not covered by AOAC policy or insurance.

2. Participation Statement

Rock climbing is an activity with a danger of personal injury or death. Participants in this activity should be aware of and accept these risks and be responsible for their own actions and involvement.

3. Event Planning

At least annually, the Climbing Coordinator will convene a meeting to establish a calendar of outdoor climbing activities for the summer and winter seasons. The meeting will also determine Activity Leaders responsible for each individual activity. These activities will be suitable for individuals with a range of different Experience Levels, and will be listed on the Club Calendar by the Climbing Coordinator or other nominated Event Organiser.

4. Experience Levels

The Experience Level is the level at which the Participant can confidently and safely perform the skills identified in Table 1. These levels are self-selected by the individual, and it is strongly recommended that caution is exercised in doing so. As an individual progresses, they may choose to self-select into a higher Experience Level, however it is recommended that they seek advice and an informal assessment from an Instructor or Outdoor Activity Leader before doing so.

Experience Level	Skills Required
Beginner	None required. Complete Beginners should attend at least 3 indoor or outdoor climbing sessions with AOAC prior to progressing to Novice.
Novice (Outdoor top rope and/or Second)	Can tie a figure eight knot. Can confidently and safely belay on outdoor top rope. Communicates using standard climbing calls. Understands basic climbing venue etiquette. Understands the reasons for, and complies with the Club requirement for outdoor climbers to wear helmets during the activity. Note: In order to progress to Competent Level a Novice climber should attend the AOAC Learn to Lead training course or an equivalent external course.
Competent Boulder Climber	Can use a guide book to correctly identify boulder

	<p>'problems'.</p> <p>Can effectively place protective matting at the base of a problem.</p> <p>Can safely 'spot' a fellow boulder climber.</p>
Competent Sport Climber (Single-pitch)	<p>Very competent at all Novice level skills.</p> <p>Can assess the serviceability of all equipment to be used before climbing with it.</p> <p>Can use a guide book to correctly identify routes.</p> <p>Can confidently and safely belay a lead climber.</p> <p>Can climb on lead and safely clip in to fixed gear (bolts).</p> <p>Can safely assess rock and bolt quality, and other hazards during climbing and take appropriate measures to prevent injury to themselves and their belayer.</p> <p>Can confidently and competently thread the anchors using at least 2 points of safety attachment.</p> <p>Can strip a route of all placed gear whilst being lowered to the ground.</p>
Competent Sport Climber (Multi-pitch)	<p>Extremely competent at all single-pitch Sport Climber skills.</p> <p>Can competently build a safe belay using fixed gear (bolts) on a sport multi-pitch stance.</p> <p>Can safely abseil/rappel using an appropriate device and back-up/autoblock.</p> <p>Can competently belay a second from above.</p> <p>Can safely supervise a second and ensure they make themselves safe at the stance.</p> <p>Understands the consequences of and takes steps to avoid a factor 2 fall.</p>
Competent Trad Climber (Single pitch)	<p>Competent at all Novice level skills.</p> <p>Can assess the serviceability of all equipment to be used before climbing with it.</p> <p>Can use a guide book to correctly identify routes.</p> <p>Can confidently and safely belay a lead climber on a trad route with single and/or half ropes.</p> <p>Can climb on lead and safely place a variety of leader placed protection e.g. nuts/wires/rocks, cams, threads and spikes.</p> <p>Can safely assess rock and placement quality, and other hazards during climbing and take appropriate measures to prevent injury to themselves and their belayer.</p> <p>Can safely and effectively remove leader placed protection from the rock and stow it on their harness.</p> <p>Can confidently and competently build a belay anchor using at least 2 anchor points ensuring that each anchor is: secure, redundant, equalized and suitably angled, has no extension and points naturally down the climb.</p> <p>Can competently belay a second from above, both left and right handed.</p> <p>Can competently identify a suitable abseil/rappel anchor and set up an abseil rope.</p> <p>Can safely abseil/rappel using an appropriate device and back-up/autoblock.</p>

Competent Trad Climber (Multi pitch)	Extremely competent at all single-pitch Trad Climber skills. Can safely supervise a second and ensure they make themselves safe at the stance. Understands the consequences of and takes steps to avoid a factor 2 fall. Can prusik up a rope.
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Table 1: Experience Levels and minimum skills required to achieve each level

5. Individual Event Requirements

Each outdoor event must be led by an approved Outdoor Activity Leader with an appropriate Experience Level for the type of climbs planned. The Outdoor Activity Leader will manage the event according to their responsibilities set out in Section 6. Event Participants will participate in events according to their Experience Level, and comply with their own responsibilities set out in Section 7.

An event group may be subdivided into smaller groups when actually climbing routes. Each sub-group should have a nominated Lead Climber or Lead Climbers i.e. if alternating leads.

Beginner level outdoor activity Participants must be supervised by an Outdoor Climbing Instructor. The instructor should have all members of the beginner level group in sight at all times; therefore, group size should not normally exceed 6 in total, assuming 2 groups of three on adjacent climbs. i.e. one climbing, one belaying and the third person holding the dead rope.

For outdoor climbing activities, it is expected that each Competent+ Participant will have their own harness, shoes, rock climbing helmet, belay device and locking carabiner as a minimum. Beginner or Novice level Participants may wish to use their own equipment, subject to approval by a Rock Climbing Instructor, and /or hire equipment from the Club.

6. Responsibilities of the Outdoor Activity Leader

The Outdoor Activity Leader must ensure that on each event:

- They review the generic risk assessment (and site specific risk assessments if written) and mitigate risks as necessary, both before and during the activity
- All Beginners are identified and allocated to an Outdoor Climbing Instructor in order to be taught the techniques required to progress to Novice level. Outdoor Activity Leaders may only instruct, or supervise Beginners if they are also an Outdoor Climbing Instructor
- All Novices wishing to learn to lead belay should be partnered with a Competent+ level climber and actively supervised by the Outdoor Activity Leader when belaying a lead climber (maximum 2 Novices per Outdoor Activity Leader). If the Outdoor Activity Leader is also an Outdoor Climbing Instructor then 2 novices may be partnered together, under supervision. Suitability for unsupervised lead belaying should be confirmed by an Outdoor Activity Leader or Outdoor Climbing Instructor
- Coordination of the Lead Climbers including briefing on the chosen venue, rendezvous points, general communications and event management etc.
- Checking and advising on good practice to Club climbers as required during sessions

- Informing Beginners/new members on the event of Experience Levels and the method of self-selection as described in Section 4
- Management of any incidents during an event and if necessary, ensuring that the emergency services are informed.
- The Climbing Coordinator is informed of any accident or injury as soon as possible after the event, and details of the incident are reported using the AOAC website form

7. Responsibilities of all event Participants

Each event Participant must ensure that they:

- Self-select into an appropriate Experience Level and err on the side of caution if unsure
- Book onto events through the Club website and inform the Organiser if they subsequently are unable to attend
- Use a rock climbing harness, belay device and carabiner that meet UIAA/CE safety standards for rock climbing equipment, is within its usable lifespan as recommended by the manufacturer, and regularly inspect such equipment for wear and tear
- Wear a UIAA/CE approved rock climbing helmet when belaying or climbing or in the immediate vicinity of cliffs/crags
- Advise the Outdoor Activity Leader of any relevant medical conditions
- Follow the instructions of the Outdoor Activity Leader
- Notify the Outdoor Activity Leader if they are uncertain about performing a particular procedure safely
- Use an anchor or resistance device when belaying anyone more than 1.5 times their own body weight
- Carry out appropriate “buddy checks” with their climbing partner
- Act in a way that does not negatively affect the enjoyment of other climbing venue users.

8. Selection of Outdoor Activity Leaders

A person wishing to be an Outdoor Activity Leader must fulfil either of the following criteria:

- Hold a suitable NGB Outdoor Climbing Instructor award (e.g. Rock Climbing Instructor), or
- Be a Competent level climber in the associated discipline (i.e. Sport, Trad or Bouldering), and have climbed outdoors for a period of at least six months at a variety of climbing venues, including the specified venue for the event.
- Hold and maintain a valid 8 hour (minimum) First Aid qualification. Note, subsidised training is available from AOAC.

Prospective Outdoor Activity Leaders who do not hold suitable NGB qualifications must be assessed and confirmed by a minimum of three current Outdoor Activity Leaders to have a suitable level of experience before being permitted to lead the particular activity. At least one assessor must be an NGB qualified Outdoor Climbing Instructor. The Climbing Coordinator is to provide a list of competences to be checked during the assessment(s).

Outdoor Activity Leaders who have been approved for roped sessions may also lead bouldering sessions by default; however, if an Outdoor Activity Leader has only been

approved for bouldering they must be further assessed for roped sessions before being permitted to lead such sessions.

A register of Outdoor Activity Leaders will be maintained by the Climbing Coordinator and published on the AOAC website. It will be reviewed at the annual Climbing Development and Planning Meeting.

9. Approval of Extended Remit for Outdoor Climbing Instructors

It is accepted that NGB qualified instructors can operate in accordance with the remit applicable to their qualifications held. This operating remit may be "extended" for AOAC activities in accordance with this SOP. An individual's NGB award will be recorded alongside the Extended Remit in order to assist Event Organisers when selecting suitable Outdoor Climbing Instructors for events.

Any person wishing to act in an Outdoor Climbing Instructor capacity with "Extended Remit" must satisfy themselves, the Climbing Coordinator and, through the unanimous consensus of three or more suitably qualified and experienced Outdoor Climbing Instructors, that they have sufficient personal experience, competence and currency of performance for the desired extension. The following factors will determine this level:

- Valid and current NGB qualifications already held. Copies and verification of award certificates will be required.
- Valid and current training courses, which have been attended as applicable to the activity.
- Personal climbing experience and ability.
- Familiarity with the activity venues and environmental conditions.

To be considered for Extended Remit, Instructors must submit an application (template available from the AOAC website or from the Climbing Coordinator), providing the information stated above, to the Climbing Coordinator for consideration.

There are 2 levels of extended remit:

- Limited. This is the normal level of extension that may be granted and allows the Instructor to work in locations and conditions that they are suitably familiar with. The number of participants in a group instructed by the holder of a limited extended remit is not to exceed the NGB guidelines.
- Full. This level of extended remit should only be given to an individual who is exceptional and who has clearly proven that they have all of the skills, experience and personal attributes required of the full NGB qualification. Any leader granted a full extended remit must have completed the relevant NGB training course for the qualification for which they are granted extended remit.

In either case the Extended Remit will not exceed one level above the NGB qualification held, and applicants will be encouraged to undergo the relevant NGB training prior to being granted Extended Remit. All Extended Remits are to be reviewed at the annual Climbing Development and Planning Meeting. Extended Remit instructors should be encouraged to gain the full NGB qualification in due course.

Records of all instructors' NGB awards and Extended Remits will be held by the Climbing Coordinator, copied to the AOAC Development Officer.

An Outdoor Climbing Instructor granted a Limited Extended Remit is not permitted to instruct at any activity venue that they are unfamiliar with, even if that venue is similar to another venue that they are familiar with. An exception to this is when they are operating under the overall control of a qualified instructor who has briefed them on the venue and

provides regular supervision throughout the event.

Any Outdoor Climbing Instructor found to be acting in disregard to these SOP may be considered negligent and is to be reported to the AOAC Committee for possible disciplinary action.

10. Risk Management

A generic Risk Assessment for AOAC rock climbing activities is available through the Club website and will be maintained by the Climbing Coordinator.

All Activity Leaders and Activity Participants must follow the AOAC Health and Safety Policy at all times.

11. Definitions

- Outdoor Climbing Instructor: An individual who holds a National Governing Body (NGB) qualification for outdoor rock climbing instruction and in the context of this SOP may act as an Outdoor Activity Leader by default as described in the approval process at Section 8
- Outdoor Activity Leader: the person supervising, directing and providing peer-guidance to participating members during the course of an AOAC event. This person will be responsible for dynamic risk management during the activity.
- Climbing Coordinator: The individual with overall responsibility for compiling and coordinating the AOAC climbing activity programme and providing leadership to climbing activity within AOAC.
- Event Organiser: A person who plans and publishes to the calendar one or more AOAC events. Note, the Event Organiser does not need to be an Outdoor Activity Leader or Instructor themselves but should ensure that Outdoor Activity Leaders are nominated for the event.
- Lead Climber: A person nominated during an outdoor event to act as the lead climber within a self-contained group of climbers on a route.
- Event Participant: Individual AOAC member participating in the specific event.

Enclosure: Outdoor Activity Leader - Competence Checklist (available through Club website)