

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

Reviewed: Mar 24 (for review again Feb 2027)

## 1. Introduction

This Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) sets out the procedure for holding indoor rock climbing and bouldering events within Avon Outdoor Activities Club (AOAC). It also identifies the responsibilities of participants, in order to ensure that indoor rock climbing events are safe and enjoyable for all. This SOP does not apply to indoor 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

AOAC recognises that indoor 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 indoor climbing events for the summer and winter seasons. The meeting will also determine Event Organisers and where possible Indoor Activity Leaders responsible for each individual event. These events 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 strongly recommended that they seek advice and an informal assessment from an Instructor or Indoor Activity Leader before doing so.

Experience level	Skills Required	Can be signed of by
CLIMBING		
Beginner	# None required. NOTE: Beginners should attend at least 3 climbing sessions with AOAC or equivalent prior to be signed of as ITRC. To be signed of as OTRC minimum 1 of 3 should be an outdoor session"	organiser
Refresher	# Has previously been at least ITRC, but hasn't climbed in a while and needs a refreshing of	organiser

	skills	
ITRC (Indoor Top Rope Competent)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li># Has attended at least three AOAC beginner climbing sessions or equivalent</li> <li># Can tie in with a figure eight knot.</li> <li># Can confidently and safely belay from below on top rope.</li> <li># Communicates using standard climbing calls.</li> <li># Understands basic climbing wall etiquette.</li> <li># Can safely catch a fall as belayer</li> <li># Can safely take a fall as climber</li> </ul>	CWI (FE) and above
ILC (Indoor Lead Competent)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li># Competent at all ITRC skills.</li> <li># Has attended at least 10 AOAC sessions or equivalent</li> <li># Can confidently and safely belay from below on lead.</li> <li># Can climb on lead and safely clip in to fixed gear as per Approved Venue rules</li> <li># Can safely catch a fall from above the clip as belayer</li> <li># Can safely take a fall from above a clip as climber</li> </ul>	CWDI (LE) and above
OTRC (Outdoor top rope competent)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li># Has attended at least three AOAC sessions or equivalent of which at least one was outdoors</li> <li># Can tie a figure eight knot.</li> <li># Can confidently and safely belay from below on outdoor top rope.</li> <li># Communicates using standard climbing calls.</li> <li># Understands basic climbing venue etiquette, the impact of climbers at the crag, ethics, access and environmental considerations for climbers.</li> <li># Understands the reasons for, and complies with the Club requirement for outdoor climbers to wear helmets during the activity.</li> <li># Can abseil on anchor set up by competent leader</li> <li># Knows fundamental climbing movement skills and climbing styles</li> <li># Can identify hazards, manage risk, understand common injuries, knows how to get help and the role of Mountain Rescue and associated emergency services.</li> <li># Can safely second a route</li> <li># Can safely belay from below on top rope and</li> </ul>	RCI (LE) and above

	catch a fall # Can safely take a fall as climber	
SLC – SP (Sport Lead Competent – Single Pitch)	# Very competent at all OTRC skills and has done at least 10 indoor or outdoor climbs and belays # Has attended the AOAC Learn to Lead training course or equivalent # Can assess the serviceability of all equipment to be used before climbing with it. # Can use a guide book to correctly identify routes. # Can confidently and safely belay a lead climber from below. # Can climb on lead and safely clip in to fixed gear (bolts). # Can safely assess rock and bolt quality, and other hazards during climbing and take appropriate measures to prevent injury to themselves and their belayer. # Can confidently and competently thread the anchors using at least 2 points of safety attachment. # Can strip a route of all placed gear whilst being lowered to the ground. # Can safely catch a fall from above the clip as belayer # Can safely take a fall from above a clip as climber	RCI (LE) + SLT and above
SLC – MP (Sport Lead Competent – Multi Pitch)	# Extremely competent at all SLC-SP skills. # Can competently build a safe belay using fixed gear (bolts) on a sport multi-pitch stance. # Can safely abseil/rappel using an appropriate device and back-up/autoblock. # Can competently belay a second from above. # 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.	Self selection as pr. SOP and co-signed by 2 climbers of same level, who are RCI (FE) and above
TSC – SP (Trad Second Competent – Single Pitch)	# Competent at all SPL-SP skills # Has participated in an AOAC Trad skill share session or appropriate Trad training session # Can competently remove gear # Can safely abseil/rappel using an appropriate device and back-up/autoblock.	Self selection as pr. SOP and co-signed by 2 climbers of same level, who are RCI (FE) and above

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li># Can competently and safely belay a lead climber on a trad route from the ground.</li> <li># Can safely and effectively remove leader placed protection from the rock and stow it on their harness.</li> </ul>	
TSC – MP (Trad Second Competent – Multi Pitch)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li># Competent at all TSC-SP skills</li> <li># Has done a minimum 10 single pitch trad climbs as a second</li> <li># Can safely attach to an anchor</li> <li># Can safely belay from below standing on a stance or a ledge</li> </ul>	Self selection as pr. SOP and co-signed by 2 climbers of same level, who are RCI (FE) and above
TLC – SP (Trad Lead Competent – Single Pitch)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li># Very competent at all TSC-SP skills</li> <li># Can assess the serviceability of all equipment to be used before climbing with it.</li> <li># Can use a guide book to correctly identify routes.</li> <li># Can confidently and safely belay a lead climber on a trad route with single and/or half ropes.</li> <li># Can climb on lead and safely place a variety of leader placed protection e.g. nuts/wires/rocks, cams, threads and spikes.</li> <li># Can safely assess rock and placement quality, and other hazards during climbing and take appropriate measures to prevent injury to themselves and their belayer.</li> <li># 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.</li> <li># Can competently belay a second from above, both left and right handed.</li> <li># Can competently identify a suitable abseil/rappel anchor and set up an abseil rope.</li> <li># Can safely supervise a second</li> </ul>	Self selection as pr. SOP and co-signed by 2 climbers of same level, who are RCI (FE) and above
TLC – MP (Trad Lead Competent – Multi Pitch)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li># Extremely competent at all TLC-SP skills.</li> <li># Can safely supervise a second and ensure they make themselves safe at the stance.</li> <li># Understands the consequences of and takes steps to avoid a factor 2 fall.</li> <li># Can prussic up a rope.</li> </ul>	Self selection as pr. SOP and co-signed by 2 climbers of same level, who are RCI (FE) and above
Bouldering		

IBC (Indoor Bouldering Competent)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li># Can safely 'spot' a fellow indoor boulder climber.</li> <li># Understands the risk of injury by dropping from the top hold.</li> <li># Understands the risks of climbing above/below/adjacent to another boulder climber and takes appropriate steps to mitigate those risks.</li> </ul>	IBL
OBC (Outdoor Bouldering Competent)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li># Can use a guide book to correctly identify boulder 'problems'.</li> <li># Can effectively place protective matting at the base of a problem.</li> <li># Can safely 'spot' a fellow boulder climber.</li> </ul>	OBL
Via Ferrata		
VFB (Via Ferrata Beginner)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li># No skills required but a reasonable level of fitness in line with the proposed activity (including walkout) and a suitable "head for heights" is required.</li> <li># Initial instruction must be provided by a qualified VF Instructor</li> </ul>	VF instructor
VFN (Via Ferrata Novice)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li># Has received formal instruction on the basic techniques</li> <li># Has completed at least 2 VF routes at F level of difficulty (or greater)</li> <li># Can securely fit a climbing harness.</li> <li># Can safely attach a VF lanyard and understand the principles of using dual leashes.</li> <li># Can tie a figure eight knot (for use when being belayed up a section of the VF route).</li> <li># Can communicate using standard climbing calls.</li> <li># Understands basic VF etiquette.</li> <li># Understands the reasons for, and complies with the Club requirement for VF participants to wear helmets, gloves and appropriate footwear during the activity.</li> </ul>	VF instructor
VFC (Via Ferrata Competent)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li># Very competent at all Novice level skills.</li> <li># Has completed at least 2 VF routes at PD level of difficulty (or greater) and have learnt to belay a lead climber.</li> <li># Can assess the serviceability of all equipment before use.</li> </ul>	VF instructor

	# Can use a guide book to correctly identify routes. # Can confidently and safely belay a leader on an exposed pitch of a VF route. # Can safely assess rock and fixed equipment quality, and other hazards and take appropriate measures to prevent injury to themselves and other participants. # Can confidently remove leader placed equipment and stow it safely on their harness whilst climbing a route.	
--	--	--

Table 1: Experience Levels and minimum skills required to achieve each level

## 5. Individual Event Requirements

Each event must be led by an Activity Leader and must be held at an Approved Venue. The Indoor 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.

## 6. Responsibilities of the Indoor Activity Leader

The Indoor Activity Leader must ensure that on each event:

- All Beginners are identified and allocated to a Climbing Instructor in order to be taught the techniques required to progress to Novice level. Indoor Activity Leaders may only instruct or supervise Beginners if they are also a Climbing Instructor.
- All Novices wishing to progress to Competent level must be partnered with a Competent level climber and actively supervised by the Indoor Activity Leader when belaying a lead climber (maximum 2 Novices per Indoor Activity Leader). Suitability for progression to Competent level should be confirmed by an Indoor Activity Leader
- Checking and advising on good practice to Club climbers as required during sessions
- Informing Beginners of Experience Levels and the method of self selection as described in paragraph 4
- 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
- Uses a rock climbing harness, belay device and carabiner that meet UIAA/CE safety standards for rock climbing equipment, and regularly inspects such equipment for wear
- Follows the instructions of the Activity Leader/Approved Venue staff and all Approved Venue rules

- Notifies the Activity Leader if they are uncertain about performing a particular procedure safely
- Uses an anchor or resistance device when belaying anyone more than 1.5 times their own body weight
- Acts in a way that does not negatively affect the enjoyment of other climbing wall users.

#### 8. Selection of Indoor Activity Leaders

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

- Hold a suitable NGB Climbing Instructor award (e.g. Climbing Wall Instructor, Rock climbing Instructor), or
- Be a Competent level climber, and have climbed indoors for a period of at least six months at a variety of climbing walls, including the specified activity venue.

Prospective Indoor Activity Leaders who do not hold NGB qualifications must be assessed and confirmed by a minimum of three current Indoor 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 Climbing Instructor. The Climbing Coordinator is to provide a list of competences to be checked during the assessment(s).

Indoor Activity Leaders who have been approved for roped sessions may also lead bouldering sessions by default; however, if an Indoor 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 Indoor Activity Leaders will be maintained by the Climbing Coordinator and published on the AOAC website.

#### 9. Risk Management

A generic Risk Assessment will be produced by the Climbing Coordinator for indoor climbing events at the Approved Venues. This should be reviewed by the Indoor Activity Leader prior to the event. All Indoor Activity Leaders and event participants must obey the AOAC Health and Safety Policy at all times.

#### 10. Definitions

- Climbing Instructor: An individual who holds a National Governing Body (NGB) qualification for rock climbing and in the context of this SOP may act as an Indoor Activity Leader by default as described in the approval process at paragraph 8.
- Indoor Activity Leader: A person supervising, directing and providing peer-guidance to Event Participants during the course of an AOAC indoor climbing activity. This person will be responsible for dynamic risk management during the event.
- 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 Indoor Activity Leader themselves but should ensure that Indoor Activity Leaders are nominated for the event.

- Event Participant: An individual AOAC member participating in the specific event.
- Approved Venue: An artificial climbing wall venue which has been approved by the Association of British Climbing Walls ([www.abcwalls.co.uk](http://www.abcwalls.co.uk)) or similar best-practice organisation.

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