

10.7.4 – ROCK ACTIVITIES – CHIEF COMMISSIONER’S DIRECTIVE & STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE

Acknowledgements

This Chief Commissioner’s Directive/Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) was written using information contained in the 2012 Scout Field book, AAS Victoria & NSW, Superseded Scouts ACT Rock policy 2006.

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1 Purpose

This Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for Rock Activities is written to detail the basic procedures, required qualifications, and provide guidance on participation limits for undertaking rock activities within the context of the Scouts ACT program. This SOP does not replace training for rock activity leaders, nor are they a substitute for activity leaders utilizing their training and experience to monitor conditions and the activity and adopting appropriate techniques.

Note: Within Scouts ACT, SOP's are co-named as Chief Commissioner's Directives. This administrative arrangement supports an appropriate delegation and approval process for such documents.

2 Scope

This SOP covers rock activities that are considered to be “adventurous” in nature, whether undertaken on natural or man-made surfaces and structures, including:

- Abseiling
- Climbing
- Caving
- Bouldering
- Canyoning

Further guidance on adventurous activities can also be found in the Adventurous Activity Standards available via <http://australianaas.org.au/>. These additional standards also provide state specific guidance.

A copy of the Victorian standard is also on the Scouts ACT website:
<https://www.scoutsact.com.au/auth/aa---sops.html>.

This SOP operationalises the requirements in Scouts ACT's Policy 10.1 – Approval of Scouting Activities, 10.7 – Adventurous Activity Policy and 10.8 – Risk Management (see <https://www.scoutsact.com.au/policies-and-procedures.html> for copies). As such, it is identified as 10.7.4.

Guidance notes have also been issued: 1. Understanding Adventurous Activities Qualifications; 2. Approving Adventurous Activities; and 3. Adventurous Activities charges. These notes provide additional guidance on understanding how to conduct Adventurous Activities in Scouts ACT. These can be found at <https://www.scoutsact.com.au/auth/aa---guidance-notes.html>.

Scouts ACT Adventurous Activities will operate within the rules, regulations and guidelines as legislated by *The Work Health and Safety Act 2011* and will comply with all the Work Health and Safety Matters as issued by ACT WorkSafe as managed by the Office of Regulatory Services <http://www.ors.act.gov.au/>.

3 Definitions

Abseiling – a process of descending vertical or steep slopes and surfaces, whether natural or manmade, through the use of ropes to allow for a controlled rate of descent. Also referred to as rappelling.

Activity Guide – an Appointed Guide with qualifications in specific activities (such as vertical caving, canyoning, abseiling (single or multi-pitch). They are authorised to lead specific adventurous activities within a defined scope and for novice participants. An Activity Guide will hold a minimum VET Certificate 3 level recognised skills in specific rock activities (e.g. vertical caving), and hold other VET qualifications in outdoor recreation related to outdoor skills, first aid, and presenting skills as defined by the NAAF, required to be used by all Scouts Australia Branches. A Scouts ACT Leader holding the required qualifications is eligible to become a Scouts ACT Appointed Activity Guide (e.g. Scout Appointed Activity Guide – Vertical Caving). Scout Appointed Activity Guides from other Scouts Australia Branches are accorded reciprocal rights.

The individual must be aged at least 18 years old.

Activity Leader in Charge (ALC) – an Appointed Activity Guide with qualifications in specific activities (such as vertical caving, canyoning, abseiling (single or multi-pitch) who has overall responsibility for the conduct of the adventurous activities. Where only one Appointed Activity Guide is present, that person shall also be considered the Activity Leader in Charge. Where more than one Appointed Activity Guide is present, one person will be designated as the ALC.

Adult Helper - an adult registered with a scouting group who has completed mandatory training.

Adventurous Activity – in the context of scouting, an activity which is beyond the normal “in-hall” program and which may involve being in relatively remote locations and where participants are exposed to an increased, but managed, level of risk. Adventurous Activities include bushwalking, sailing, canoeing, motor sports, rock climbing, recreational caving, hot air ballooning, and others.

Adventurous Activity Standard (AAS) – a series of documents prepared through the Outdoor Recreation Industry Council and which provide guidance on the skills, qualifications and other relevant aspects for how an Adventurous Activity should take place.

- Assistant Guide – an individual who is assisting Activity Guides to deliver an activity but does not hold a formal guide appointment. Such individuals might hold a Branch issued qualification, qualifications issued by other organisations including at the VET level, or significant experience and are considered SMEs. Alternatively the Assistant Guide may have been assessed as competent by the Activity Leader in Charge to perform specific functions, may be “guides in training” and may be Venturers, Rovers, Section Leaders, or Adult Helpers. Assisting on activities is a key part of their on the job learning.
- Bouldering – the process of climbing and/or traversing low cliff faces or large rocks and where the participant’s feet are no higher than 1.5m off the ground. Bouldering does not involve the use of ropes or other equipment to prevent a fall.
- Canyoning – the negotiation of a narrow chasm with steep sides cut by running water; a gorge or ravine which incorporate vertical pitches.
- Caving – involves the negotiation of cave systems that have been formed by natural means that has created passages and caverns in varying sizes and complexity. Caving may be horizontal, where areas are accessed by foot or short climbs (under 2 meters), or vertical, where technical rope and laddering skills are required.
- Dependant participant – any participant who does not have the qualifications or competencies relevant to the activity and for whom the Activity Guides owe a duty of care throughout the activity.
- Instructor and Assessor - an individual who is authorised to deliver training and perform assessments within their scope of qualification. An instructor will hold certain aspects of the VET Certificate 4 level qualifications in Training and Assessment, plus relevant qualifications in a specific skill area, and hold a Wood Badge, as defined by the NAAF. A Leader holding the required qualifications is eligible to become a Scouts Australia Appointed Instructor and Assessor, i.e. it is a National Appointment. It would be expected that a Leader nominated by a Branch for an Instructor and Assessor appointment would be an existing Branch Scout Appointed Activity Guide.
- Laddering - a technique of ascending rock faces, usually within a cave, via temporarily installed ladders. Such ladders are typically of a flexible wire construction.
- Lead Climbing – a rock climbing activity where protective points of a temporary nature are placed by a rock climber as they climb a cliff with the climbing rope being attached as the climber progresses. The climber will be above a point of protection at times and has the potential to fall a significant distance.
- Leader Trainer and Assessor - an individual who is authorised to deliver training and perform assessments. Assistant Leader Trainers and Leader Trainers will hold VET Certificate 4 level qualification in Training and Assessment, plus all the requirements of a National Instructor, and meet all of the requirements as defined by the NAAF. They are members of the National Training Team, which is by invitation.
- Matrix - the ‘Scouts Australia Adventurous Activities Training & Assessment Matrix’. This matrix provides details of the Scout and VET units application to Scouting, the relationship between Scout and VET qualifications, and the requirements for each listed adventurous activity.

- Multi-pitch** - a section of abseiling, climbing, or laddering where safe ground cannot be reached within a single rope length. This might be due to the total length of the pitch, or because the route needs to avoid certain obstacles that then creates a potential for a swinging fall or excessive rope drag.
- NAAF** - the ‘Scouts Australia National Adventurous Activities Framework’ (NAAF). This framework defines the qualifications requirements for Scouting Leaders responsible for leading, instructing, and assessing the various types of adventurous activities.
- Participant** - any person who is not an Activity Guide, Assistant Guide, or Activity Leader in Charge and is undertaking the adventurous activity.
- Rappelling** – see Abseiling
- Rock Climbing** – the process of ascending natural or man-made cliffs with ropes and other protective equipment being used to prevent a significant fall or serious injury.
- Safe Zone** - an identified area where there is minimal risk of harm and where non-active participants should remain. This includes being away from cliff edges, the bottom of a cliff or other hazardous area.
- Section Leader** - a member of the Scouts Association who holds a Certificate of Adult Appointment (CoAA) and is authorised by the Scouts Association to assist with activities involving youth members. This can include section leaders, Activity Guides and other positions.
- SME** - Subject Matter Expert. An individual with specific qualifications relevant to an adventurous activity. Such individuals might hold a Branch issued qualification, qualifications issued by other organisations including at the VET level, or significant practical experience.
- SRT** - Single Rope Technique. A suite of skills used to ascend and descend a single rope, to change over from ascending to descending, and to pass over knots and anchors while remaining attached to the rope. SRT is a fundamental skill set to entering and exiting vertical caves as it provides vertical mobility on a single rope.
- Top Rope Climbing** – a rock climbing activity where a rope is attached to protective points or an anchor above the climber in a semi-permanent manner and is controlled so as to prevent a fall.

4 Leadership of Rock Activities

For all rock activities that are run through Scouts ACT, a Scouts ACT Appointed Guide will be designated as the **Activity Leader in Charge (ALC)** and will be responsible for the overall leadership of the activity or series of activities. It is the leader responsible for approving the rock activity who also designates the ALC. For Branch Activities it is the Rock Commissioner. For group activities it is the Group Leader (or appropriate authority) who is approving the rock activity. This formal appointment is in addition to holding the necessary qualifications identified in the NAAF and Matrix for a specific adventurous activity. This person will be designated the Activity Leader in Charge.

Specific aspects of an activity or series of activities may be led by other Activity Guides, or by Assistant Guides with oversight from an Appointed Activity Guide. It is up to the Activity Guide and Activity Leader in Charge to determine what level of supervision is required.

5 Use of External Providers

Scouts ACT Groups may use external (eg. non-Scouting) providers for rock activities provided the provisions of Guidance Note 2 – Approving Adventurous Activities (<https://www.scoutsact.com.au/auth/aa---guidance-notes.html>) are applied when using a non-Scouting provider.

Particular attention should be paid by the person approving the activity to the following:

- A Scout Appointed Leader is responsible for the overall activity and is present throughout the activity. It is highly desirable that other Scout Appointed Leaders are also present to meet the ‘two-deep’ requirement.
- The approver is satisfied that the non-Scouting provider has:
 - A good reputation and safety record;
 - Appropriate qualifications and training of its staff (do they have industry qualifications, how well do they train their staff);
 - A risk management plan;
 - Appropriate insurance and the nature of an indemnity, if any, required to be signed by participants or the Leader in charge.
 - Note: this can be an area of uncertainty. Providers will on occasions require participants to waive what appears to be all individual rights, including negligence by the provider, equipment failure, or a lack of training – suggesting their insurance cover is weak. While this is arguably not generally legally enforceable, a subsequent legal process may be complex.
 - A ‘Hold Harmless clause’ may indicate the provider does not have appropriate protection arrangements in place, however its presence does not by itself exclude the use of a provider. However, the arrangements overall should be determined.
 - There is no clear national Scouting position given the individual nature of each provider, their conditions of participation, and the different insurance arrangements of the Branches of Scouts Australia.

Group Leaders should seek further advice from the Branch Commissioner Adventurous Activities if they are in any doubt about the suitability of a proposed non-Scouting provider. The Branch Commissioner may seek further advice to assist advising Group Leaders.

6 Risk Assessment and Activity Approvals

Rock activities are hazardous if not done correctly. Therefore, a current risk assessment and management plan must be in place for every rock activity session. Standard or baseline assessments should be reviewed for currency prior to the activity.

Activities must be approved by either the Rock Commissioner, or the relevant Group Leader.

- For activities organised at the Branch level or by the Rock Activities Team and which are expected to involve multiple scouting groups, the overall approval should come from the Rock Commissioner, Adventurous Activities Commissioner, or other individual as delegated. Examples of such activities are rock activity training, specialist activity programs, and major activities arranged by Branch Venturer Council or Branch Rover Council where the anticipated participants are expected to come from a wide range of Groups. Where relevant, a copy of the risk assessment and activity approval should be forwarded to the Section Leaders whose youth are involved in the activity.
- For activities primarily organised as Group activities, but which might include participants from another Group (such as a joint Venturer Unit activity), the overall activity approval should come from the relevant Group Leader. If the Group Leader is not available, the Rock Commissioner may approve the rock-based adventurous activity. This could include activities organised and run for a single Group (e.g. twilight abseiling or an individual caving activity), or for events organised around participating Groups (e.g. rock activity weekends where a number of Groups may attend, but where participation is based around the Groups or Sections).

Section Leaders are responsible for participant consent forms, indemnities, camp site bookings and all catering considerations for participants. Section Leaders are also responsible for all risk assessments and approvals for other activities (e.g. camping, hiking, or construction challenges that might be part of a weekend activity).

Environmental conditions and risks are constantly changing. Even after an activity has been approved, the relevant Activity Guides and Activity Leader in Charge should constantly monitor and manage risks. The Activity Leader in Charge and Activity Guides have the right to modify or cancel any activity at any time, even after it has commenced.

7 Supervision of youth members

The role of Activity Leader in Charge and Activity Guides is to ensure the safe delivery of the adventurous activity. The Activity Guide(s) and/or Activity Leader in Charge may delegate certain roles to Assistant Guides or other individuals during the activity subject to an assessment of competencies.

While activities are underway the Activity Leader in Charge, Activity Guides and SMEs are responsible for the safety of participating youth and their directions are to be followed at all times. Throughout the activity, Section Leaders and Adult Helpers are required to assist with group management and monitoring the safety and actions of youth members not directly involved in the activity.

After the adventurous activity has completed, full responsibility for youth members returns to the Section Leader.

8 Safety and Equipment

Safety equipment used for rock activities is highly specialised. All equipment must be designed specifically for the purpose and bear a relevant certification such as UIAA or EN.

Manufacturer recommendations should be followed for the proper use and application of all rock activities equipment.

Equipment must be constantly monitored for serviceability and damage. Any equipment identified as no longer being serviceable should be marked and disposed of or destroyed. It should not be given away or otherwise put in a place where it might be incidentally used for a future rock activity.

While it is recognised that there are differing views about the lifespan and stability of manufactured items, manufacturer recommended lifespans should also be adhered to. Metal components, such as ascenders, descenders and carabiners are widely considered to have an indefinite lifespan provided they are not damaged. However, attention should be given to physical wear on items such as descenders, ascender cams, and carabiner gates.

Items containing “soft” components, such as rope, accessory cord, helmets and harnesses are considered by many manufacturers to have a maximum lifespan of 10 years when unused and stored correctly. Lifespans are reduced for these items dependant on the level of use. Attention should also be given to any damage to ropes, harness webbing and buckles.

Equipment purchased for rock activities should be recorded in an appropriate system that tracks its date of purchase and anticipated serviceable life. A log should also be kept of ropes that are taken for activities to allow for use to be monitored.

When not in use, all rock activity safety equipment must be stored out of direct sunlight and away from any potential chemical contamination. Areas used for storage of rock activity gear must not be used for the storage of acids, wet-cell batteries, solvents, or caustic chemicals. Where dry/alkaline batteries (e.g. for head torches) or soaps for cleaning are stored, they should be separated from safety equipment.

On each activity, a first aid kit appropriate to the activity must be available. For caving activities in particular, it may be appropriate to have a smaller first aid kit carried on the activity with a more extensive kit available at the surface.

For each activity involving vertical rope work, a vertical rescue gear appropriate for the activity and assessed risks must be available. Where activities are across multiple sites, appropriate vertical rescue gear must be made available at each site.

9 Activity Limitations for Sections

To maximise safety and enjoyment, and to ensure there is opportunity for members of the Scouting movement to develop their skills as they progress in age, the limitations in Table 1 below are recommended for participation in rock activities.

Specific exceptions may be appropriate for youth members “linking up”, to allow them to undertake the rock activity being run for the primary section. Other exceptions may also be considered appropriate after consultation with the Rock Commissioner or relevant Group Leader.

Participation in an activity may also require that the participant have a suitable level of competency. For many introductory activities, it will be appropriate to consider all participants as being novices and not to expect any level of skill. For other activities it may be appropriate for the Activity Leader in Charge or Activity Guides to verify that participants have a certain level of competency. For example, youth members should be competent in abseiling before undertaking an

abseil into a cave. Assessment of these skills should form part of the risk assessment and activity approval process. Assessment of these skills should also be confirmed during pre-activity briefing and throughout the duration of activities. If an Activity Guide or the Activity Leader in Charge determines that relevant competencies are not present then the activity should be modified or participants excluded at the discretion of the Activity Leader in Charge or Activity Guide.

Table 1 – Section Limitations for Rock Activities

	Joey Scouts	Cub Scouts	Scouts	Venturers	Rovers and Adults
Abseiling: artificial and natural surfaces	Maximum 8m height	Maximum 15m height	Maximum 50m height	Unlimited, including multi-pitch	Unlimited, including multi-pitch
Climbing: artificial and natural surfaces	Maximum 8m height, or Artificial Tower Top-rope only	Maximum 15m height Top-rope only	Maximum 30m height Top-rope only	Unlimited, including lead climbing and multi-pitch	Unlimited, including lead climbing and multi-pitch
Caving	Horizontal caves only	Horizontal caves only	Horizontal caves only, but may undertake a single pitch abseil to enter provided it is a walk-out cave (e.g. Dip 2 – Daylight Hole)	Vertical caving, including multi-pitch, rebelays and laddering.	Vertical caving, including multi-pitch, rebelays and laddering.
Canyoning	Not approved	Not approved	Not approved	No limitations	No limitations
Bouldering	Not approved	Not approved	Not approved	No limitations	No limitations

Note (1): While permitted under this SOP, abseiling and climbing activities up to 8m are often still particularly scary for Joey Scouts. In many cases it is preferable to limit Joey scouts to caving activities, or to simulate abseils by hauling Joey Scouts a short distance up a wall or cliff face. When climbing, Joey’s should only climb as far as comfortable. For reference the Canberra Indoor Rock Climbing gym at Mitchell has a wall height of approximately 8m.

The following cliff heights have been measured at the locations regularly visited by the Scouts ACT.

Table 2 – Cliff Heights

Wee Jasper	
Small cliff	8m
Middle cliff	15m
End cliff	25m
Bungonia	
Hogan’s Wall	15m
Camp Cottermouth	
Cub Rock	10m
Scout Rock	25m
Artificial Tower	Approx. 10m

Forward facing abseiling, sometimes called Australian rappelling, is not an approved activity under this SOP.

10 Group Size and Participant Ratios

The rock activities program is directed at challenging and developing youth members and therefore all activities should be focussed on this outcome. However, any member of Scouts ACT can participate. This includes Section Leaders and registered Adult Helpers. In many cases, the involvement of adult members of the movement is key to a successful activity.

Maximum and minimum group size is an important consideration for any rock activity. This includes the minimum number of Activity Guides and other Leaders required to effectively manage activity risks, and the maximum number of Dependant Participants that can effectively be accommodated. Specific activities or locations may also have limitations. Physical limitations and medical considerations may also affect participant to leader ratios.

As general guidance, a minimum of two Activity Guides should be present at any rock activity session. This is to ensure that even if one Activity Guide were to become incapacitated for any reason another Activity Guide would be able to effect or initiate a rescue.

It is also a requirement that all activities include a Leader (that is an adult member with a CoA). Under most circumstances the total ratio of youth members to adults should not exceed 6:1.

These combined requirements can be met in a variety of ways, and any individual may fulfil multiple roles. For example a Section Leader who also hold their Activity Guide appointment, if accompanied by another Activity Guide would jointly satisfy the 2 Activity Guide and 1 Leader requirement and could take 12 youth members on a rock activity. With the addition of an Adult Helper, a total of 18 youth members might participate.

10.1 Specific Guidance for abseiling activities

As a general consideration, there must be an Activity Guide or SME present at the top of the cliff or artificial structure to observe and ensure that all equipment is checked for each Dependant Participant prior to committing to the rope. The location and presence of other Activity Guides and Assistant Guides will depend on the nature of the activity. Where multi-pitch abseiling is undertaken an Activity Guide or SME should also be present at the commencement of each subsequent abseiling pitch for dependant participants. Where participants are considered competent at the relevant VET level this direct supervision might be waived.

The choice of a top or bottom (aka “fireman’s”) belay is to be made based on the nature of the activity, experience of participants, and an assessment of risks. Generally, top belay is the preferred technique for novice participants, younger participants, heavy participants (dependant on the descending device selected) and in situations where a rescue might be anticipated. Top belay systems are more reliable in arresting a potential fall and can be readily locked off or converted to a hauling system if required.

When a top belay is employed it must be performed by an Activity Guide, an SME, or by other individuals under supervision of an Activity Guide or SME and with a backup belayer as considered appropriate to the activity, participants and experience of the belayer.

When a bottom belay is employed, belaying may be performed by participants, but belayers must be assessed as competent by an Activity Guide or SME. Where youth members are performing the belay, they should be backed up by a second belayer. An Activity Guide, or Assistant Guide should have oversight of the belaying to ensure it is being performed correctly and to intervene as appropriate.

Where there is any doubt about whether the deployed ropes are able to reach safe ground, or whether they might be tangled or “hung up” an Activity Guide should individually check each rope. This may be done by walking to the bottom of the abseil, or by being the first to descend each rope.

The Activity Guide to participant ratios below in Table 3 relate only to participants actively participating in an abseil – that is the participant is actively attached to a rope. Total group size is dependent on the capacity of the Activity Guides and leaders to ensure that non-active participants remain in designated safe-zones.

Table 3 – Guide to Participant Ratio

Situation	Guide to participant ratio (where the activity is for youth participants)	Notes:
Top belay by Guide	1:1 One Activity Guide or SME per rope	
Top Belay by Assistant Guide / participants	1:2 One Activity Guide or SME may supervise up to two adjacent ropes. Each rope will be	The Activity Guide or SME must visually check all descending devices and equipment (eg harness, helmet, clothes,

	operated by an Assistant Guide or participant and a backup belayer where determined necessary.	hair, etc) prior to a youth member committing to the rope.
Self-belay	1:4 One Activity Guide or SME can supervise (or perform) up to four adjacent ropes. The Activity Guide should cross check the attachment to the rope and self-belay device.	Self-belay is permitted for Venturers and participants aged 18+. Venturers can only self-belay where the Activity Guide or SME is satisfied that they have the technical skills and competence to do so safely. It is recommended to only be applied as part of training activities, or by participants holding at least a VET (or equivalent) recognised competency in abseiling skills. A top or bottom belay backup is recommended.
Bottom Belay	1:2 One Activity Guide or SME can supervise (or perform) the commencement of abseiling on up to two adjacent ropes. However, sole attention should be given to a single participant as they attach to the rope and commence an abseil.	The Activity Guide or SME must visually check all descending devices and equipment (eg harness, helmet, clothes, hair, etc) prior to a youth member committing to the rope. An Activity Guide, Assistant Guide or other competent individuals should be at the bottom of the cliff to observe and instruct the belayer(s).
Multi-pitch	1:1 An Activity Guide or SME must be present at the commencement of each abseil pitch and cross check each participant's descending device and harness prior to committing to the rope.	Choice of belaying system according to risk assessment.

10.2 Specific guidance for horizontal caving activities

Horizontal caves are those that do not require safety ropes or abseiling skills to navigate. The use of a protective handline to assist with grip or progress does not mean that a cave is no longer horizontal in nature.

While preference is given to having two Activity Guides on activities, the nature of many horizontal caves is that they are relatively easily navigated. Per the relevant Adventurous Activity Standards, a key consideration is to ensure that there are two individuals that would be capable to lead the party to safety. The second competent person with knowledge of the cave might be either an Activity Guide, an SME, or an Assistant Guide (including Venturers who are training in rock activities) who are familiar with the cave.

It should also be noted that some sites limit the total party size.

Wee Jasper Caves – specific details

The horizontal caves at the Wee Jasper Reserve are small in size and pose minimal navigational challenges. Where approved by the Activity Leader in Charge, a single Activity Guide or SME may lead a party, but must be assisted by a Section Leader. Where this occurs the Activity Guide or SME should update the Section Leader on how to exit the cave and make them aware of any specific hazards. Caves covered under this policy include:

- WJ-08 Signature Cave
- WJ-66 Enigma Cave
- WJ-01 Dip Cave – series 1
- WJ-02 Dip Cave – series 2 (walk in only)
- WJ-13 Dogleg Cave

Parties led by one Activity Guide and one Section Leader into these caves should be limited to 12 youth members for a total party size of 14.

Bungonia Caves – specific details

In addition to the leader to participant ratios, the rangers at the Bungonia State Recreation Area have advised of a maximum caving party size of 12.

Bungonia Caves are also known to regularly experience foul air phenomenon. Section Leaders and participants should be specifically briefed on this scenario and the course of action to take if foul air is encountered.

A number of the horizontal caves at Bungonia are small in size and pose minimal navigational challenges. Other caves such as B44-Grill Cave are not difficult to navigate, but have a number of hazards present. Where approved by the Activity Leader in Charge, a single Activity Guide or SME may lead a party, but must be assisted by an Assistant Guide or Section Leader familiar with the cave as appropriate. Where the Assistant Guide is under 18 years of age, a Section Leader must be present as the second adult.

- B44 – Grill: Activity Guide + SME or Assistant Guide (plus additional adult as required)
- B25 – Mass Cave: Activity Guide + Section Leader
- B31 – Argyle Cave (entrance chamber only, not past The Flattener): Activity Guide + Section Leader
- B35 – Holland’s Hole (no further than Hip Hugger) : Activity Guide + Section Leader
- B4-5 – Hogan’s Hole and Fossil Cave. While this cave can be navigated without ropes, it should be treated as a vertical cave due to the Hairy Traverse and exit via Fossil Cave entrance.

As detailed in the Adventurous Activity Standards a key consideration is also the availability of suitable skills to lead the group and manage a range of potential emergency situations. At a minimum, most activities should include at least two individuals competent of leading the group, as well as appropriate first aid skills. An important consideration here is the management of a group should an Activity Guide become incapacitated. There should always be other individuals able to

lead the party to safety or an evacuation point, or to contact emergency services, without placing the injured person at further risk.

10.3 Specific guidance for vertical caving activities

Vertical caves are those that require the use of abseiling, ascending and/or laddering skills to enter, negotiate and/or exit the cave. Vertical caving activities are limited to Venturers, Rovers and adult members. Participants must be assessed as competent in the necessary skills to undertake the activity prior to entering the cave. This includes abseiling, hauling, laddering, SRT and undertaking tyrolean traverses as appropriate.

For all vertical caves, two Activity Guides or SMEs must be present on each activity. Assistant Guides (where they are not considered SMEs) are not to count for the total number of activity leaders unless they are specifically approved by the Rock Commissioner or delegate.

For the purposes of determining multi-pitch versus single-pitch caves, any cave where a single rope pitch reaches safe ground is considered single pitch. The determining factor for a multi-pitch caving activity is where a participant needs to connect to an anchor or re-belay point on an otherwise continuous abseil. However, while undertaking a number of vertical pitches within a single cave (e.g. Dip 4 hole and the rathole at Wee Jasper, or the Hairy traverse and Fossil Cave at Bungonia) does not make a cave multi-pitch, careful consideration should be given to participant experience and safety considerations during planning.

A specific exemption exists for Dip 2-Daylight hole at Wee Jasper Reserves which is a single pitch abseil followed by a walk out. Scouts may abseil into the cave if approved by the Activity Leader in Charge and subject to them being assessed as competent abseilers. In this situation the abseiling guidance in Section 9.1 should be followed and after the initial abseil, the cave shall be considered horizontal in nature.

10.4 Specific Guidance for canyoning activities

Vertical canyons are those that require the use of abseiling and SRT skills to enter, negotiate and exit the canyon. Vertical canyoning activities are limited to Venturers, Rovers and adult members. Participants must be assessed as competent in the necessary skills to undertake the activity prior to entering the canyon. This includes abseiling and ascending as appropriate.

For the purposes of determining multi-pitch versus single-pitch, a single pitch canyon is any canyon where there is only one single rope pitch that reaches safe ground and allows participants to exit the canyon without further abseils, The determining factor for a multi-pitch canyoning activity is where all participants need to undertake multiple abseils in the canyon with no options to safely exit the canyon between the abseils.

For all vertical canyons, two Activity Guides, or one Activity Guide and one SME must be present on each activity. Assistant Guides (where they are not considered SMEs) are not to count for the total number of activity leaders unless specifically approved by the Rock Commissioner or delegate. At least one Activity Guide or the SME must be familiar with the canyon.

For single pitch canyons there must be at a minimum, one appointed single pitch canyon Activity Guide and one Activity Guide/SME. The second Activity Guide or SME must hold at a minimum, single pitch abseil guiding qualifications or skills.

For multi pitch canyons there must be at a minimum, one appointed multi pitch canyon Activity Guide and one Activity Guide/SME with multi pitch canyon guiding qualifications or skills. The

second Activity Guide or SME must also hold, at a minimum, single pitch canyon guiding qualifications or skills and be experienced in multi-pitch canyons.

For parties involving youth members in vertical canyons there is a maximum party size of eight and a minimum of five.

10.5 Specific Guidance for top rope climbing activities

Top rope climbing is characterised by cliffs, the top and bottom of which can be reached safely by foot. Where the bottom of a cliff is only reachable by abseiling, the abseiling specific guidance may also apply in order for participants to reach the start of the climb.

For top rope climbing where the Activity Guide or SME is not participating in the climbing activity, a single Activity Guide or SME may lead an activity, provided that they are supported by a Section Leader or other Leader formally appointed by Scouts ACT. An Appointed Activity Guide must also have oversight of the activity.

The Activity Guide/SME to participant ratio for top rope climbing activities relates only to the participants actively climbing, or in other words, the number of active ropes. Where the Activity Guide/SME is performing the belay, they must only be responsible for a single rope. In this case an Activity Guide/SME to Participant ratio of 1:1 shall apply.

Where participants are performing the belaying function, no more than four active ropes per Activity Guide/SME should be in operation at any one point in time. An Activity Guide, SME, or Assistant Guide should be supervising the belaying technique for no more than two adjacent ropes at any point in time. Where novice participants are belaying, consideration should be given to using a backup belayer.

If an activity is being led by a single Activity Guide or SME and that individual leaves the belaying site for any reason, all climbing activities must cease.

An Activity Guide, SME, or Assistant Guide must visually check all belay devices and equipment (eg harness, helmet, clothes, hair, etc) prior to a youth member committing to the rope.

10.6 Specific Guidance for bouldering activities

Bouldering is characterised by cliffs, large rocks and other structures that are climbed to a low height or traversed in a left to right or right to left manner. Bouldering commonly involves a small number of difficult rock climbing moves undertaken where the participants feet are never more than 1.5m from the ground.

Due to the low height involved, the risk of a serious fall is reduced, though the often difficult nature of the activity means that a fall is more likely. Each bouldering site is different, but the use of protective “crash” mats should be considered in all cases. Each bouldering participant should also have a “spotter”, that is an individual assisting to protect the climber from a serious fall. The role of the spotter is to support or direct the participant’s upper body and head to prevent hitting the ground. The spotter may also provide assistance in locating the next hand or foot hold.

The Activity Guide/SME to participant ratio for bouldering activities relates only to the participants actively bouldering. Where the Activity Guide/SME is performing the spotting duties, they must only be responsible for a single participant. In this case an Activity Guide/SME to Participant ratio of 1:1 shall apply. If participants have been assessed as competent and are performing the spotting, an Activity Guide/SME may supervise up to two active bouldering participants.

11 Behavioural and Medical Considerations

Participation of youth members and all other dependant participants is at the sole discretion of the Activity Leader in Charge and Activity Guides/SMEs. In the case of any dispute the Activity Leader in Charge has ultimate authority.

Youth members, Leaders and other adults assisting, must disclose any medical, physical or behavioural condition that could impact on the successful completion of the activity, or be aggravated by the activity. In most cases medical conditions can be accommodated into activity plans.

Section Leaders are ultimately responsible for ensuring all youth members medical needs are met throughout the activity, including the monitoring of conditions and administration of prescribed medications, in particular those that are to be administered on a given schedule. Activity Guides will provide first aid and first response treatments in the case of an accident or other unforeseen event.

12 Competencies and currency

As a baseline, all Activity Guides must hold VET recognized qualification in a broad skill set relevant to outdoor activities and Adventurous Activities in general. These are often referred to as the “Common Core”. It is worth noting that the Common Core aligns closely with the Certificate III in Outdoor Recreation “Core”, but it is not a requirement to hold a formally issued Certificate III.

Adventurous Activity Guides must also hold VET recognized qualifications in a specific activity area and at a specific level. Completion of the relevant qualification modules defines the nature and scope under which an activity guide can operate.

All qualification requirements for Adventurous Activities are detailed in the NAAF, including those related to Rock activities and the requirement for Scout Appointed Guides. Further details for the Scout and VET unit level for each adventurous activity is provided for by the Matrix.

Activity Guides holding relevant VET recognized qualifications must then also be appointed by Scouts ACT to operate as an Activity Guide. That appointment will confirm the scope and duration (generally three years) for the appointed leader to lead activities as an Activity Guide.

To maintain currency of skills recognition, Activity Guides must undertake a minimum number of activities per calendar year. Where a higher level of qualification is held (e.g. Climbing Level 3) and competency is maintained, it is not necessary to demonstrate currency at the lower level (e.g. Climbing Level 2).

For a full list of competency units, refer to the NAAF.

Required skills are separated into levels. Each progressive level defines a broader scope of activities that can be undertaken, from simple to complex. Capacity to guide an activity at a specific level is an additional qualification.

12.1 Abseiling specific skills

Level 1 skills define the core competencies for safe participation in an abseiling activity. They enable participants to be responsible for their own safety and to operate belay systems effectively,

but do not provide them with the skills to establish anchors or rope systems. For that reason, Level 1 skills are not relevant for Activity Guides, though these may be relevant for participants.

Level 2 skills define the core competencies for an individual to safely establish ropes for an abseiling activity and undertake abseiling. Level 2 skills are limited to single pitch applications - that is activities where participants start on safe ground and descend a single rope to reach safe ground. With the relevant guiding module, this is the basic level that an Activity Guide will obtain.

Level 3 skills define the additional competencies required for undertaking a multi-pitch abseiling activity. Such activities include disconnecting and reconnecting to different established ropes during the activity and rigging complex anchor systems.

12.2 Caving specific skills

Level 1 skills define the core competencies for safe participation in a horizontal caving activity. They enable participants to be responsible for their own safety and to navigate simple caves. It does not provide them the skills to operate safety systems or provide care for a group.

Level 2 skills define the core competencies for a safe participant in a vertical caving activity. They enable participants to be responsible for and to rig and apply single pitch abseils and laddering.

Level 3 skills define the core competencies for a safe participant in vertical caving activity where multiple or complex vertical pitches will be encountered.

Activity Guides for caving activities may be appointed at one of three levels – horizontal, vertical-single pitch, or vertical-multi pitch.

12.3 Rock climbing specific skills

Level 1 skills define the core competencies for safe participation in a climbing activity. They enable participants to be responsible for their own safety and to operate belay systems effectively, but do not provide them with the skills to establish anchors or rope systems. For that reason, Level 1 skills are not relevant for Activity Guides, though these may be relevant for participants.

Level 2 skills define the core competencies for an individual to safely establish ropes for a climbing activity and undertake tope rope climbing. Level 2 skills are limited to single pitch applications - that is activities where participants start and finish on safe ground. With the relevant guiding module, this is the basic level that an Activity Guide will obtain.

Level 3 skills define the competencies required for undertaking a lead climbing activity. Such activities include the selection and placement of temporary anchors systems, disconnecting and reconnecting to different established ropes during the activity and rigging complex anchor systems.

12.4 Canyoning specific skills

Level 1 skills define the core competencies for safe participation in a canyoning activity. They enable participants to be responsible for their own safety and to operate belay systems effectively, but do not provide them with the skills to establish anchors or rope systems. For that reason, Level 1 skills are not relevant for Activity Guides, though these may be relevant for participants.

Level 2 skills define the core competencies for an individual to safely establish ropes for a canyoning activity and undertake canyoning. Level 2 skills are limited to single pitch applications - that is activities where participants start on safe ground and descend a single rope to reach safe ground. With the relevant guiding module, this is the level that an Activity Guide must obtain for single pitch canyoning.

Level 3 skills define the additional competencies required for a canyoning Activity Guide to lead a multi-pitch canyoning activity. Such activities necessitate that participants will disconnect and reconnect to different established ropes during the activity. Participants will also be committed to finishing all subsequent abseils in order to exit the canyon. This in turn means that there will be a higher level of risk and potentially a lower level of direct observation of participants by activity guides. With the relevant guiding module, this is the level that an Activity Guide must obtain for multi pitch canyoning.

13 Pre Activity Briefing

Prior to undertaking an activity, participants and leaders must be provided with sufficient information on the activity to allow them to be adequately prepared for and able to give informed consent for their participation. Practically, the pre-activity briefing will take two stages. It is the responsibility of the Activity Leader in Charge to ensure this has occurred.

13.1 Pre-consent briefing

After the activity has been booked, or during the enquiry phase, information should be provided to the relevant Section Leader(s), Group Leader(s), or participants about the nature of the activity. The goal of this briefing is to ensure that participants and leaders are properly prepared with appropriate clothing and footwear and be aware of what activities will likely be included.

Generally, this briefing will be undertaken 2–4 weeks before the activity and may be primarily based on electronically transmitted information (e.g. over email).

It may also be considered desirable for participants to have a pre-activity briefing during a section night.

These briefings should include:

- The activity location and times
- An outline of the activity and objectives
- The likely physical and mental/emotional aspects of the activity
- Essential or recommended clothing or other equipment to be provided by participants
- Recommendations of food and water
- Explanation of what is expected from Section Leaders with regard to medical issues
- Communication of the risk assessment for the activity.

13.2 Pre-activity briefing.

Directly before the activity is undertaken, participants should be provided a briefing to ensure that they are aware of the nature of the activity, key risks, group management, and how emergencies will be responded to. As an Activity Guide, this briefing will include:

- identity and role of Activity Guides and other leader(s)
- an outline of the activity plan and objectives
- the nature of the activity and its inherent risks

- correct use and/or fit of equipment
- recommendations on the type of food, the amount of food and water required and the availability of water
- strategies for conservation including protection of flora and fauna, rubbish removal and sanitation
- a summary of the emergency plan or sufficient information to allow participants to act appropriately in the event of an incident or emergency, including methods of emergency communication and egress from the activity site
- an explanation of what is expected of participants and the participant's responsibility to act as requested (conduct etc.)
- restrictions to participation
- agreed methods of communication within the group (signals and calls) devised before the activity commences

Leaders should receive acknowledgment that participants have understood the content of the briefing.

Leaders must offer each participant the opportunity to voice any concerns.

14 Further reading

Nil.

15 References

Nil.

16 Authority

As a Branch Policy or amended Policy, this was approved by the Branch Executive Committee on 28 February 2001, October 2013 and March 2016.

This Chief Commissioner's Directive/Standard Operating Procedure was approved by the Chief Commissioner on 17 February 2018.

17 Appendix 1: Assistant Guides and Training Opportunities

Note: This appendix does not form a formal part of the SOP. It is provided to give general guidance and a statement of intent.

A key aspect of the Scouting movement is to provide for activities in a safe and enjoyable manner and to provide training for youth members. Therefore, while the rock activities program is designed to provide for participation in adventurous activities by youth members, providing training and on-the-job experience is integral to a successful and holistic program. This training includes skills being taught to Venturers as part of a Queen's Scout Award, and VET level skills for Venturers, Rovers and other adults who are seeking to lead activities.

While rock activity sessions need to be overseen by Appointed Activity Guides and run by qualified Activity Guides and/or SMEs (e.g. a Certificate III in Outdoor Recreation or part thereof, with relevant specialist units), the involvement of Assistant Guides and other trainees is strongly encouraged. Assistant Guides do not hold formally recognised skills or necessarily possess significant practical expertise to an equivalent level, but are able to support activities while they develop these skills.

Generally, the first step in the process will be attendance at a rock activities training course which runs over a number of days. At this course the basic skills, knots and techniques will be taught to participants. During the course of the training, it would be anticipated that participants would demonstrate skills to meet a Level 1 standard and substantially complete Level 2 requirements.

After having completed a training course, trainees would then seek to assist with a range of rock activities at a range of locations as Assistant Guides. During this time subject matter experts and appointed Activity Guides will assist, provide on-the-job training, and mentor trainees as they further develop their skills and confidence. Over time this process will also allow trainees to complete training workbooks or compile a portfolio of evidence and seek formal recognition as appropriate.

Where trainees come with substantial prior experience, or where a course is not scheduled for some time, trainees might progress immediately to assisting with activities.

When rock activities are being provided for a section or Group, the number of trainees or Assistant Guides may be limited at the discretion of the Activity Leader in Charge. Generally, the number of trainees or Assistant Guides would not exceed the number of Activity Guides/SMEs on the activity, which provides on average a 1:1 level of support and mentoring. To help maximise the opportunity for trainees on rock activities they are encouraged to sign up to the rock activities email list and to commit early to activities.

It is also not possible for all skills and experience required, to be gained during regular rock activities. While every effort will be made to involve and provide learning opportunities for trainees, skills such as vertical rescue and many cave and canyon specific techniques will require dedicated training sessions.

18 Appendix 2: Support for Venturers under Training

Note: This appendix does not form a formal part of the SOP. It is provided to give general guidance and a statement of intent.

As noted in Appendix 1, providing training support for Venturers is one important function of the rock activities program. However, outside of the designated rock activities, the Activity Guides do not have any specific responsibility to or duty of care for Venturer participants. Where rock activities occur overnight, Venturer's should make arrangements for unaccompanied and self-sufficient camping consistent with the expectations of their Unit, Venturer Leader, and/or Group Leader. This is no different to undertaking unaccompanied hikes within other aspects of the Venturer and Queen's Scout Award Scheme.

To assist with any emergency situation during the rock activities or at any other time, standard consent forms with contact details for a parent/guardian should be provided to the Activity Leader in Charge prior to the activity.

As the members of the rock team are individuals and in most cases not section Leaders, it will often not be possible to assist Venturers or other youth members with transport to or from activities and still meet the Scouts Australia "two deep" policy. Therefore, transport arrangements should be made early.

It is recognised that this may place a burden on Venturer participants in training activities. However, in return, the participating Activity Guides are committed to providing meaningful roles within the rock activities program, opportunities to further Venturer participant's activity leadership skills, and on-the-job mentoring and training in the relevant technical skills. It is recognised that Venturers and all other trainees are likely to be valuable contributors to the success of the rock activities program into the future and developing their capacity and capability is an investment for the future.