



Activity: UK single-pitch rock climbing and abseiling

General

This risk assessment covers all Will4Adventure climbing and abseiling activities for all UK single pitch crags.

Here, a single pitch climb is that as defined by Mountain Training as:

... a single pitch route is one which:

- is climbed without intermediate stances.
- is described as a single pitch in the guidebook.
- allows climbers to be lowered to the ground at all times.
- is non-tidal, non-serious and has little objective danger.
- presents no difficulties on approach or retreat, such as route finding, scrambling or navigating.

Any crag that is in a wilderness area needs to have a suitably qualified leader (HML or above) depending upon the area.

Best practice means that leader to client ratios should not exceed 1:6. Usually with a group of six this allows for two climbs to be set up simultaneously, with two groups of three. In exceptional circumstances where the group have demonstrated good safety awareness and sound belaying and climbing skills at the crag, a third climb may be set up at the discretion of the leader.

Group activities are lead by an RCI holder or above. The presence of a RCI trainee would count as a second leader, though the award holder retains responsibility throughout all activities.

The leader for all courses that involve lead climbing should hold at least the Rock Climbing Development Instructor's (RCDI) award or greater.

Leader's Responsibilities

When planning any climbing the following should be taken into consideration:

- Crag and route suitability
- Weather conditions
- Prevailing conditions
- Previous experience of the group
- Equipment available and history of use
- Previous knowledge of the group

Crag Suitability

- The area at the base of the crag used should be an area safe from exposed edges and safe from rock fall.
- There should be ease of access to the top and bottom of the crag.

Further guidelines

- Semi-direct or direct belaying systems are always preferable for novices given suitable ground anchors.
- Soloing as a means of rigging a wall must be avoided.
- Leaders should always model and demonstrate good practice and wear head protection, and maintain safe practice when rigging climbs, roping up as necessary / possible.

Risk Subject	Method of Mitigation
Suitable staff	All staff employed will be suitably qualified. All staff must ensure they remain up to date with best practice regarding equipment and technique.
Assessing clients' ability	Clients' previous experience should be explored upon meeting, using a range of questions. Through the day clients should be briefed on what to expect before the activity takes place and thus given the opportunity not to take part.
Suitable objectives	A thorough assessment of the clients' previous experience, knowledge, ability and aims must be made prior to the course.
Suitable venues	Leaders should use venues that they feel confident to use as well as always working within the scope of their experience, knowledge, ability, and equipment. Venue and route choice are key in ensuring a safe and appropriate activity, and therefore leaders will ensure careful planning goes into venue and route selection. No route should be planned that involves areas known to be of high risk or prone to major rock falls or land slippage. Where the terrain to access a venue is slippery, helmets need to be issued and worn.
Equipment	Leaders must routinely inspect their equipment as per manufacturer guidelines. Equipment with evidence of wear and/or deemed unsafe must be retired and replaced. Staff must ensure equipment is both used in the correct manner, stored in a safe way (following manufacturer advice) and replaced regularly according to level of usage and wear. All equipment must be used in-line with manufacture recommendations.
Client equipment	At the start of the day, leaders to brief team members and check clothing and equipment for suitability prior to setting off. Consideration must be given to wind, cold, precipitation and heat. Leaders should check clients' own personal protective equipment (PPE) such as helmets are in good condition showing no obvious defects. They should inquire to its origins. If in any doubt as to the clients' PPE clients will be required to use company equipment. All PPE must be the correct size & fit for the participant. Leaders are to regularly inspect PPE to ensure it is being worn correctly. Clients with long hair should be encouraged to tie back their hair with a hair band.
Adverse weather conditions	Leader should check up to date mountain forecast for the area paying attention to wind speed and direction, precipitation, temperature, and UV exposure. Alternative plans which could include cancellation or postponement should be considered beforehand. Will4Adventure will ensure clients are briefed on appropriate dress before setting off for the crag/venue via joining instructions emailed out prior to a course. Alternative plans should be considered beforehand.
Lightning	Team should not be outside during lightning storm where possible. In the event that the team are out then the leader should take best course of action to get team to safest (lowest) location away from high ground and trees. All climbing should cease. Team should keep away from caves.
Rockfall	Craggs known to have excessive loose rock should be avoided. At venues known for loose rock all team members must wear helmets when within 10m of the base of the crag. Team need to be briefed on warnings shouted such as "below!" or "rocks!" Team should be briefed by leader on action for kicking rocks loose. Leaders may need to brief other climbers at such venues of action in the event of rock fall also.

Safety near edges	Routes that have clients top out should be equipped with a ready fixed line/sling with an open screw-gate carabiner. For the first few ascents the leader must meet the climber at the top to ensure they know what they should be doing. Leader should check anchors and forward carabiners, checking that they are hanging down and still secure. Clients need to be kept away from all edges unless roped or attached to an anchor with a sling. Thorough briefing required for all clients on safe conduct at the crag and at the top of routes climbed. The leader should brief clients on safe descent routes. Leader and clients should wear helmets for descent. Abseiling clients should have a safety line attached before moving to the top of the abseiling station.
Slips	Clients should be briefed on fallibility of walking in rock shoes on grass and moss.
Bouldering	For bouldering activities leaders should consider the benefits of wearing a helmet or not. No climbers should wear harnesses for bouldering. For each climber there needs to be a competent spotter. (This could be a leader or a client who has been adequately briefed and trained). Where climbers can top out on boulders that are 2m or higher, the leader must make careful appreciation for height, difficulty of route, climber ability, and the consequences of a ground fall.
Abseiling	Leaders should consider carefully the venue for any abseiling. The best venues will have high anchors, a suitable platform from which to abseil, no ledges en route down, and a boulder free and even floor. Where platform lip may be at risk of being slippery due to rain and/or polish, clients should wear rock shoes if they are not wearing approach shoes (for climbing activities).
Stuck climber or abseiler	Leaders should never apply undue pressure to make clients climb up/abseil down anything that they are not happy to do. Leaders should continually monitor individual client's well-being / confidence on the crag. The leader must ensure that systems and equipment in use allow for possible extrication. Where a nervous climber is keen to try something, the leader must first be satisfied that they are in a position to facilitate a rescue if needed. In the event that a client becomes crag fast the first thing all leaders must try is talking the climber down. Only in the last resort should a leader start climbing up to, or abseiling down to a stuck climber.
Working with young climbers	Leaders must recognise that children can wander off especially if they are not usefully employed or occupied. To that end leaders should always consider the pace and tempo of any climbing session with family groups, and consider what safe background activities (if any) might be useful. The leader should especially make clear the boundaries for where children can wander whilst not engaged in climbing activity.
Emergencies	All leaders must hold a current outdoor first aid qualification. All leaders must carry suitable first aid kits and ensure that these undergo regular inspection and are renewed according to manufacturer guidelines and current practice. . Leaders must ensure they set off with a fully charged mobile phone and consider carrying a spare battery pack for charging. Leaders must consider the availability of mobile signal in chosen locations, as well as ease of access for rescue services. All clients will be asked to inform Will4Adventure about all pre-existing medical conditions. Leaders need to be appraised of the clients' medical conditions.
Understanding the risk	The level of risk acceptance of course participants should be explored. The basic risks and levels should be made clear to clients.