

High Ropes



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Introduction

This factsheet provides further advice and clarification of the requirements for constructing and operating high ropes activities in Scouting as defined in POR.

High Ropes Activities

Examples of activities that are classed as high ropes activities are:

- High ropes course or individual element
- Zip wire
- 3G swing
- Crate stacking
- Prusiking up a rope
- Using caving ladders and SRT (single rope technique) when not caving

Examples of activities not classed as high ropes activities are:

- Climbing
- Abseiling
- Using caving ladders and SRT when caving
- Low ropes courses
- Bouldering
- Aerial runways
- Pioneering projects (that don't require belays)

There is no height definition for when an activity becomes a high ropes rather than a low ropes activity. This will depend on many factors such as; the participants, the activity, the environment etc. The defining characteristic is that; when an activity should use a safety system (such as belaying) then it becomes a high ropes activity.

Activities like monkey bridges and low level prusiking using spotting / crash mats rather than a

belay system are not classed as high ropes as they don't use a safety system such as a belay.

The key point is whether an activity **should** have a safety system, not whether it actually does have this system. This means that a high ropes activity cannot be made into a low ropes activity just by taking the safety system away as this could make the activity more hazardous for those involved.

Zip Wires vs Aerial Runways

Zip wires tend to be permanent constructions, while aerial runways tend to be temporary structures where constructing the aerial runway is often part of the activity that the young people can get involved in. The main difference within high ropes is that zip wires will generally use a harness system to attach to the zip wire, often using a simple belay system to exit the activity (meaning they are classed as high ropes), while an aerial runway will generally have a seat for participants to sit on (meaning they are not classed as high ropes).

There remains a separate 'Aerial Runway Code' to support those constructing aerial runways.

Commercial Centres

When using commercial high ropes providers (such as Go Ape) Scout parties follow the normal Scout Association rules for using external providers to run activities. Leaders are therefore not required to follow the guidelines in this factsheet when using these providers.

Existing High Ropes Courses

The UK Ropes Course Guide from AAIAC (Adventure Activities Industry Advisory

Committee), that permanent courses are required to follow, includes full details of how construction standards apply to existing high ropes courses and their maintenance and additions.

All ropes courses need to follow the operational requirements of The Scout Association, even if they were built before these requirements were introduced.

Operating Manual for Permanent Structures

The constructor of a high ropes course should provide much of the information required for an operating manual. However the operator will need to ensure that their manual includes at least the following:

- Operating procedures
- Emergency / rescue plan
- Equipment to be used
- Instructor training
- Who can carry out instructor training
- Instructor assessment / competence levels
- Who can carry out instructor assessments
- Limitations of the course / structure
- Record keeping for; training, assessments, operation, equipment, inspection, maintenance and accidents.

Climbing, Caving and Mine Permits

If setting up and running a temporary high ropes activity under a climbing, caving or mine exploration permit then what you are planning on doing needs to come within the remit of your permit. In simple terms this means that; if you put a climbing wall (or were underground) where the high ropes structure is, would your permit allow you to set up and run the belay / safety system that you are planning, using the anchors that you will be using. So if, for example, your climbing permit allows you to run climbing on a man made tower using only the fixed anchor points, this will not allow you to set up and run crate stacking using a tree and natural anchors.

Permit holders will also need to work within the remit of their permit with regard to group sizes and any further restrictions included. This means that those holding leadership permits will need to lead

the activity themselves (as they would when climbing, caving or in a mine), while those with a supervisory permit can designate leaders to groups and remotely supervise while still remaining responsible for the activity (again as they would when climbing).

Guidelines for Temporary Constructions

When running any temporary high ropes activity that involves ascending a rope (ie prusiking, SRT etc), the rope being ascended must be quickly releasable under pressure by those running the activity.

All temporary high ropes constructions must:

- Include an appropriate belay / safety system for the structure.
- Use a site that means those constructing, participating in and watching the activity can do so safely.
- Use equipment, both in the structure and belay / safety system, designed for the purpose it is being used for and following the manufacturer's guidelines.
- Where existing man made structures such as buildings are used, check that they can bear the load that will be placed on them.

Trees

Where natural features such as trees are used, check that:

- They can bear the load that will be placed on them.
- They are healthy with a substantial enough root.

If in doubt it is worth consulting a specialist arboriculturist or similar to confirm that any tree used will be able to stand up to the pressures placed on it. However there are a number of checks that you can make without the need for a professional:

- Any attachments to trees should be load tested before being used by members. This should be done in whatever is the most appropriate way for the setup and equipment that is being used.

- The best tree roots are unseen as they are buried by soil.
- The tree is supported by its roots without listing abnormally.
- All the tree limbs are healthy.
- No visible disease / fungus / wounds / damage
- No signs of weakness or over compaction (from ground covering etc) of the ground around the tree.
- Avoid:
 - Branches that grow vertically.
 - Branches that split into two vertical growths.

Operating Manual for Temporary Structures

Operating manuals for temporary constructions are generally much simpler than for permanent constructions. However the operator will still need to ensure it includes at least the following:

- Operating procedures
- Emergency / rescue plan
- Equipment to be used
- Instructor assessment / competence levels
- Who can carry out instructor assessments

Where the same structure / setup / operation is used for multiple events over time (such as a prusiking rope set up behind the Scout hut a number of times over the summer), the same operating manual can be used. It will need updating where there are changes to any of this though, and any updates will need to be agreed by someone qualified to do so.