

Intro to Climbing Leadership

Alex Ames

June 16, 2015

Contents

1	Club climbing ratings	2
2	Preparing for a trip	2
	Several days before	2
	The day before the trip	3
3	Leading a trip	4
	Meeting at Memorial Union	4
	Preparing to climb	4
	End of the day	5
A	Top-Rope Climbing Activity Group Policy	5

1 Club climbing ratings

Appendix A on page 5 contains detailed descriptions of what is entailed by each of the climbing participant/leader ratings. Brief descriptions are given here so the ratings can be used as shorthand for an approximate level of climbing skill in subsequent discussion.

- Beginner Little or no prior climbing experience. Will need full instruction on belay technique and climbing principles.
- B1 Has attended at least two Outing Club climbing trips. Able to competently belay without supervision.
- B2 Has attended several climbing trips and shown interest in climbing leadership. Attends anchor-building clinics and helps manage groups and teach belaying on trips.
- B3/Leader Has demonstrated competence in setting anchors and instructing new climbers, among other skills discussed in Appendix A on page 5. Has led trips under supervision of current climbing leaders and was recommended for B3 rating by at least two current climbing leaders.

2 Preparing for a trip

Several days before

Announce a climbing trip on the club website and/or at a weekly meeting. I use the following template for beginner climbing trips:

We're going rock climbing up at Devil's Lake State Park in Baraboo! This will be a beginner-friendly trip, so don't worry if you've never climbed before—we'll literally show you the ropes. We'll meet at the lakefront by Memorial Union at 8am, pick out gear (Hoofers has shoes, harnesses, and helmets for you to use, or bring your own), and drive up to the Lake. Once at the lake, we'll set top-rope anchors, go over belaying and knot-tying skills for those who need to learn or review, then climb until 4:30ish. We should be back in Madison around 7pm.

You must bring:

- * Breathable, non-restrictive clothing
- * 1 liter+ of water (if you bring nothing else, bring this!)
- * Lunch/snacks
- * Sunscreen

- * Sturdy, high-traction shoes for the hike up to the crag
- * A few bucks for gas and/or Culver's

You should bring (if you have them):

- * Climbing shoes
- * Climbing harness
- * Climbing helmet
- * Chalk bag

The number of spots on this trip is limited by the number of cars available. If you have a car, please let me know so I can open up more spots.

The number of spots on a trip can run into into several limiting factors:

1. Car space. Unless you happen to own a 12-passenger van or only want to lead a 4-person trip, you'll probably need other drivers. Make this clear in your event announcement. Make sure that you don't open up more spots than car capacity permits. It's good practice to open up a large number of alternate slots so you can collect information from potential drivers and easily expand the trip as more people agree to drive.
2. Club gear availability. Especially on beginner trips, it's likely that many people will not have their own gear, and will need to borrow club shoes, harnesses, and helmets. We can currently handle around 8-12 people who need club gear, depending on how much gear size overlap exists in the group.
3. Safe ratios of experienced to inexperienced climbers. As beginners learn to climb and belay, it's important to have watchful eyes on them at all times to provide guidance. The prototypical beginner trip should have something like a 1:1:1 ratio of beginner:B1:B2/3. This allows a B1 to climb on a beginner's belay, with a B2-3 backing up the belay and correcting belay technique.

The day before the trip

Check the weather forecast, and don't be afraid to reschedule or cancel if the weather looks poor—Devil's Lake is very slippery when wet. Ensure that none of the limiting factors mentioned above will come into play. Email trip participants to remind them about the trip, where to meet, and what to bring, along with any updates as prompted by changes in weather/scheduling/etc.

3 Leading a trip

Meeting at Memorial Union

Once all trip participants have arrived (or a 15-minute¹ grace period has passed), begin collecting gear. Make sure everybody has properly-fit shoes, harness, and helmet. Encourage people to purchase bottled water if they forgot to bring it.

Bring:

- Two ropes and one anchor-setting gear bag per 4-6 climbers
- First aid kit
- Extra harness/helmet
- Extra water

Instruct all drivers on which parking lot to go to in case cars get separated en route.

Preparing to climb

Once at Devil's Lake, encourage people to fill their water bottles and use the restroom by the parking lot. Make sure that all the gear discussed above is accounted for, and start the hike up the cliff. Stop for stragglers at trail junctions and scenic overlooks. At the top, find a set of co-located anchor spots that will provide access to routes spanning the group's ability range (something like 5.4-5.10 is a safe bet), and begin unpacking gear at the cliff top. Be courteous and avoid setting ropes for the entire day on classic trad routes like Brinton's Crack, since these routes will be in high demand by roving trad climbers.

As it typically takes at least 30 minutes to set anchors, the group can split temporarily, with B2s/B3s setting anchors and the other climbers either hiking along the trail or relaxing at the top or bottom of the cliff.

Carefully inspect anchor gear and ropes to ensure everything is in good condition. Set gear aside for the dumpster if it appears worn or unsafe.

Anchor-setting is too broad a subject to treat in this document. Readers should look for one of the following guides:

- Rock Climbing Anchors by Craig Luebben
- Climbing Anchors by John Long
- Mountaineering: Freedom of the Hills

With anchors set, participants can either walk or rappel to the base of the cliff. Experienced climbers can get going right away, but beginners should be taught the skills discussed in the B1 section of Appendix A on the following page.

¹Duration of grace period subject to trip leader's whims.

End of the day

Clean anchors and return club and personal gear to appropriate locations. Strive to avoid mixing gear between gear bags (most pieces of gear are color-coded for this purpose). Neatly coil ropes and make sure the cliff base area is clean of trash and personal belongings. Return to Madison, with an optional stop at the Sauk City Culvers along the way.

A Top-Rope Climbing Activity Group Policy

Taken from <http://www.hooferrouting.org/node/19>:

None of the following guidelines are intended to conflict with the rules of any commercial or other nonprofit climbing facility or group. These ratings are for Hooper Outing Club use only and may not be recognized outside of this organization.

B1 This is the first rating that a new climber will achieve. A climber who will receive the B1 rating must:

- Show competence and confidence in basic, safe belay technique.
- Be able to tie and recognize a figure-8 follow-through knot.
- Visually inspect the climber's harness to make sure that the climber has tied the figure-8 knot correctly through their harness. A B1 will also check to see that the climber's harness is being worn properly with the waist belt doubled-back.
- Be familiar with belay language and communication between climber and belayer:

PRIOR TO CLIMBING

- Climber: "On belay?"
- Belayer: "Belay on."
- Climber: "Climbing."
- Belayer: "Climb on."

DURING CLIMBING

- Climber: "Tension." Climber is requesting that belayer tighten the rope and take up slack.
- Climber: "Slack." Climber asks belayer to pay out slack.
- Climber: "Falling!" Climber warns belayer of impending fall. This is helpful to avoid surprises, but the belayer must always be alert to unexpected falls.
- Demonstrate to at least one climbing leader that they can belay safely.
- Be able to belay climbers without back-up belay.

Restrictions

- A new climber cannot receive the B1 on their first trip. This helps climbers realize that they must integrate belaying into their climbing skills and remember it without hesitation to get the rating.
- Climbers may receive a B1 rating on their second trip if they demonstrate competence and confidence at belaying. This is not guaranteed, however, since a climber may need more practice on subsequent trips.
- One climbing leader's endorsement is required; the leader signs the membership card with B1 on the rating line.
- Belay can be taught by Leaders and B2s. Climbing leaders can appoint B1s to teach belay on individual trips as the leader sees fit. This right is reserved by each leader and is good for that trip only.
- Climbers who are inactive for more than a year lose their B1 rating. Climbers can be re-rated through the above-mentioned guidelines.

Gym Leader A Gym Leader is an optional rating that a climber may obtain. The Gym Leader is considered a club leader for indoor climbing gym trips only. The gym attended must have policies that restrict the instruction of belay technique to gym staff only. A climber who will receive the Gym Leader rating must:

- Be a current member of the Outing Club and hold a B1 rating in good standing
- Demonstrate, to the climbing leaders, the ability to instruct proper fitting of the club's harnesses. This includes explaining what it means and why it is important to "double back" and to tie or clip into the "two hard points". (Annotation: based on experience, we know that gym staff do not with any regularity check a climber's harnesses for proper fitting. It is not until a climber attends a belay class at the gym that a staff member has direct contact with a climber and therefore the opportunity to instruct the climber in proper fitting of the harness. It is foreseeable that a beginner climber could climb at the gym without any of the gym's staff providing instruction. It is therefore imperative that beginner climbers know how to don & doff their harnesses. Since, the club is not allowed to instruct at a typical indoor gym, the Gym Leader is expected to instruct beginners in proper fitting of the club's harnesses prior to arrival at the gym.)
- Demonstrate, to climbing leaders, an acceptable level of leadership skills and overall responsibility.

A Gym Leader can:

- Lead trips to indoor gyms that restrict the instruction of belay technique to gym staff only.
- Have access (keys and locker combination) to the club's gear locker for the purpose of checking out and returning the following gear: harnesses, shoes and ATCs with appropriate locking carabineers.

Restrictions:

- Two climbing leader endorsements are required. These leaders should present the endorsement at a Climbing Safety Board meeting for brief discussion. Both leaders should sign the card with Gym Leader written on the rating line. (Annotation: This requirement insures that the Gym Leader candidate is known to the climbing leaders)
- Gym Leader leaders may access the gear cabinet and check out only the following gear: harnesses, shoes and ATCs with appropriate locking carabineers.
- A Gym Leader cannot certify B1 ratings by signing cards. Only climbing leaders can sign cards.
- A Gym Leader may have his/her rating revoked if at least two certified climbing leaders sign a written statement clearly explaining the reasons for revocation. The signed statement will then be presented to the Outing Club executive board for their review.
- Gym Leaders who are inactive for more than one year lose their Gym Leader rating. Climbers can be re-rated through the above-mentioned guidelines.

B2 This is the second rating a climber will achieve. A B1 who wants to advance to B2 is subject to the following general expectations from the current climbing leaders:

- Show leadership potential.
- Express interest in climbing leadership.
- Assist leaders on trips.

In order to get the B2 rating, a B1 shall be working on these skills and leadership criteria:

- Learning the interest group rules.
- Teaching belay to beginners.
- Setting top rope anchors according to the interest group by-laws.
- Ascending and descending ropes by means of Prusik and rappel.
- Assisting on climbing trips by watching the group, advising beginners on safety issues and climbing etiquette, and participating in the sport in an environmentally-sound, low-impact manner.
- Attending leadership training trips.
- Attending Climbing Safety Board meetings.
- Reading the climbing books (Mountaineering: Freedom of the Hills, Climbing Anchors by John Long) and studying anchor principles. These books are recognized by the climbing leaders to be excellent resources in learning.

The B2 is considered a leadership practice rating. The B2 will continue honing the above skills. Additionally, B2s can:

- Check out harnesses and ATCs for indoor climbing trips. The B2 will be responsible for returning the gear to the gear lockers.
- Lead climbing trips under the supervision of a leader. This is highly recommended.

Restrictions

- B2s can set top rope anchors, but the anchor must be checked over and approved by a leader.
- B2s cannot certify B1 ratings by signing cards. Only climbing leaders can sign cards.

There is no time limit for which a B2 will stay at this level. Experienced climbers may advance quickly onto full leadership while others may take one or more climbing seasons to advance. This allows each climber to advance as his or her schedules and abilities permit.

Two climbing leaders' endorsements are required for the B2 rating. These leaders should present the endorsement at a Climbing Safety Board meeting for brief discussion. Both leaders should sign the card with B2 on the rating line.

A B2 may have his/her rating revoked if at least two certified climbing leaders sign a written statement clearly explaining the reasons for revocation. The signed statement will then be presented to the Outing Club executive board for their review.

Climbers who are inactive for more than a year lose their B2 rating. Climbers can be re-rated through the above-mentioned guidelines.

Once a B2 is well-versed in the skills at this level, two leaders may endorse the B2 for full climbing leadership. These leaders should present the endorsement at a Climbing Safety Board meeting for discussion. The interest group chair person will record this endorsement, but signatures on the membership card are not required.

FAST TRACK The fast track system is designed to get experienced climbers through the system quickly so they can obtain leadership status. Climbers who join the club claiming to have advanced anchor skills must demonstrate these skills to the current leadership for discussion and approval. If the new member shows excellent top-rope anchor skills, it is recommended that the climber then lead a trip under supervision. Once the current leaders are satisfied with the new member's abilities, the endorsements can be made.

CLIMBING SAFETY BOARD Meetings: Recommended for once a month. Membership: Any club member who is interested in climbing policies may attend CSB meetings. CSB Chair: The Top-Roping Chair shall chair and run CSB meetings. The chair may appoint a proxy if the chair will be absent.

Voting Membership

- Current club climbing leaders and the chair are awarded one vote each.
- The group should work towards consensus when making decisions. Should this fail, a simple majority vote will decide an issue. In the case of a tie, the chair decides.

Agenda Chair should forward an agenda to the climbing e-mail list before the meeting and ask for additional items. Endorsements: All B2 and Climbing Leader endorsements shall be discussed at CSB meetings. Duties: The CSB's duties are as follows:

- Develop new climbing safety policies as needed.
- Discuss B2 and Climbing Leader endorsements.
- Share safety concerns and observations from previous trips.
- Keep the pulse of the interest group.
- Encourage advancing climbers to pursue leadership. This includes guiding potential leaders who may be weak in certain skill areas. Giving direct guidance can help that potential leader to focus on weaknesses and improve their skills.
- Report any mishaps with gear, including damage and losses.
- Record endorsements.

Rights

- The CSB has the right to revoke a leadership rating. Only two voting members need to sign a written statement explaining the reasons for revocation (See details under B2 Restrictions).
- The CSB cannot remove a chairperson. This action is governed by the Outing Club's general by-laws.

Appeals Process:

If a climber is dissatisfied with the decisions of the CSB, it should be discussed openly in a meeting. If the climber and the CSB fail to reach an agreeable solution, the climber may take the matter to the Executive Board for consideration.