



The School For  
Mountain Leadership

## ABSEILING TRAINING HANDOUT No 3 : THE PICK-OFF RESCUE

*This training handout may be freely reproduced  
and distributed in an unaltered form.*

### NEED MORE INFO?

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***This training handout is an aide-memoire for students who have completed the appropriate training. Do NOT attempt these techniques without proper training – getting it wrong can be lethal!***

The tutorial below assumes that this is an abseil guiding setup (with a guide operating without assistance) and that the guide/supervisor has already discovered that it is not possible to lower the abseiler/client to the ground, which would have been discovered by trying a host of simpler problem solving approaches first - pick-off rescue is a last resort. It is normally used only when it is impossible to lower a stuck abseiler to the ground or impractical to haul them to the top.

The technique involves abseiling to the stuck person, attaching them to your abseil device and then removing them from the rope(s) to which they are attached. The technique illustrated below uses minimal equipment of the type typically found at most abseil operations. If you can do it with the equipment below then additional equipment (such as a Gri-Gri) makes life easier.

#### Equipment required:

- 2 x Prussik Loops. For climbing and abseiling we recommend 6mm (if your ropes are 9-11mm) or 5mm (if your ropes are less than 9mm).
- 4 x Screwgate carabiners.
- 1 x Figure-8 or other abseil device.
- 1 x long (120cm) sling



#### **Step 1:**

Determine if rescue is needed and configure equipment.

Before launching into a rescue try all other options. Very often a simpler technique will resolve your problem for you. Once you have exhausted all other options then lock off the belay rope - it is time to configure your equipment.

While you are configuring your equipment, ***Speak to the person needing rescue*** – they are probably not very happy about their predicament and are likely to need a lot of reassurance.

Start off by knotting the sling in the middle to create an inverted 'Y'. Attach your descender (Figure-8) to the central leg of the 'Y' and connect one of the sides to your harness. Put a carabiner on the other leg – this will be connected to the person you are rescuing.

If you are unable to pull up abseil rope to connect to you may have to release some slack into the system. This makes a strong case for rigging abseils as releasable. Normally about 2m of slack is more than adequate.

Finally, put a French Prussik onto the rope and attach to your belay loop. This creates a self-belay.

Abseil down to just above the person you want to rescue.



**Step 2:**

Connect to the person needing rescue.

As you get closer to the person needing rescue, check whether you are close enough to clip the carabiner on the other side of the 'Y' to their harness – you do NOT want to go too far down!. As soon as you are able to clip to them do it!

Once this is done you can do a leg-wrap for extra security. This acts as a back-up in the event that your French Prussik self-belay should slip. You can then disconnect their abseil device from the abseil rope.



**Step 3:**

Create a lifting mechanism.

Attach a Prussik hitch and carabiner to the belay rope above the person needing rescue. You need to be able to lift this person to create enough slack in the belay rope to be able to unclip the belay carabiner(s).

Pull up the abseil rope and knot the end of it onto the harness of your rescue victim, then clip the rope into the carabiner hanging from the Prussik hitch on the belay rope.

At approximately the height of your own thigh or knee create a foot-loop in the rope by tying a figure-8 on a bight or overhand on a bight.

At this point it's a good idea to unscrew the belay carabiner(s) – it saves you trying to do this while balanced on one leg in a loop of rope!



**Step 4:**

Lift!

Put your foot into the loop you've just created and stand up. If your weight isn't enough to lift the other person, reach down and pull up on their harness as well. You need to lift them about 10-15cm.



**Step 5:**

Remove the belay.

While standing in the foot-loop remove the belay carabiners from the harness.

Once this is done slowly sit down and start to lower the person back down until they're hanging from the sling on your abseil device. Remember to take your foot out of the foot loop and untie it before it tries to pull through the carabiner.

Untie the end of the abseil rope from the rescued person's harness and pull it down through the carabiner. Check that there is still a knot in the end of the rope afterwards.

Don't worry about retrieving the Prussik hitch and the carabiner – they're probably out of your reach anyway.



**Step 6:**

Remove the leg wraps and continue to abseil.

Remove the leg wraps, making sure that you have control of the abseil rope while doing so. Remember that your French Prussik might not be able to hold the weight of 2 people and might slip.

Abseil to the ground, making sure you don't bash your newly rescued person against the wall or cliff on the way.

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Please contact us at the above addresses for further information.

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