

# TOPPING OUT

A BSA Climbing/Rappelling Manual



BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA®

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# Introduction

Young people today seek challenges. Climbing and rappelling offer them worthy opportunities to learn new skills, test themselves, and have a terrific time. It's hard to top the satisfaction of climbing a rock face and rappelling down a steep pitch. The introduction of the Climbing merit badge in the spring of 1997 spurred interest in these activities throughout the Boy Scouts of America. The proliferation of climbing areas in Scout camps and the development of artificial walls and alpine gyms across the United States have made the chance to climb and rappel available to Scouts almost everywhere.

*Topping Out* details the Boy Scouts of America's recommended procedure for conducting climbing and rappelling activities at district and council sites such as summer camps, and at council high-adventure bases. In addition to explaining appropriate equipment and techniques, this manual describes the qualifications and training of the directors and instructors who conduct BSA climbing/rappelling programs at the district and council levels. It also lays out a sample daylong program. (Readers should be aware that this manual provides an orientation only, and by itself does not constitute training in how to climb or rappel.)

There is inherent risk in climbing and rappelling. With proper leadership and adherence to high standards, however, the risk is minimized. Many factors play roles in the BSA's history of safely operating climbing/rappelling activities. Among the most important are these.

- The BSA limits district and council activities to *bouldering, top-roping, and belayed rappelling*. The National Project COPE and Climbing/Rappelling Standards (No. 430-008) apply to district and council activities. Units that elect to participate in snow and ice climbing and lead climbing without a top-rope belay should receive training from a nationally recognized organization that trains climbing instructors.
- BSA units that want to conduct their own bouldering, climbing, rappelling, or other related climbing activities should follow the guidelines put forth in *Climb On Safely*.

ALTHOUGH THE BSA HAS AN EXCELLENT SAFETY RECORD, THERE IS INHERENT RISK IN CLIMBING AND RAPPELLING. TO MANAGE THAT RISK, SCOUTING USES THE PROCEDURES SET FORTH IN TWO CLOSELY RELATED PUBLICATIONS—CLIMB ON SAFELY (FOR UNITS) AND THIS *TOPPING OUT: A BSA CLIMBING/RAPPELLING MANUAL* (FOR DISTRICTS AND COUNCILS).

**CLIMB ON SAFELY:  
THE EIGHT POINTS**

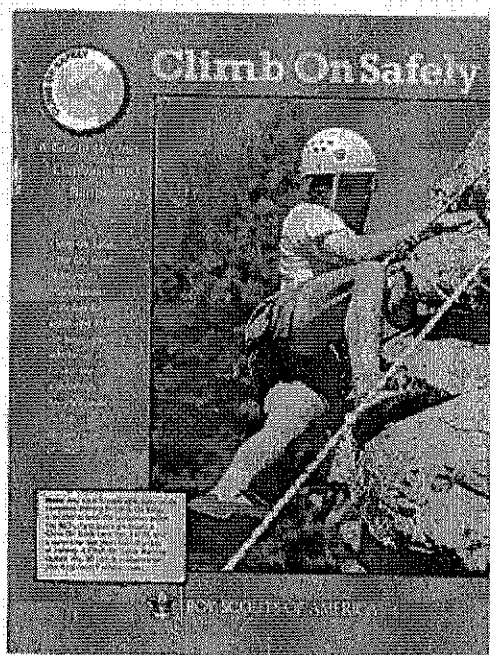
- 1 Qualified Supervision
- 2 Qualified Instructors
- 3 Physical Fitness
- 4 Safe Area
- 5 Equipment
- 6 Planning
- 7 Environmental Conditions
- 8 Discipline

## Climb On Safely and Topping Out

To better assure the safety of participants and to standardize the qualifications expected of adults leading climbing and rappelling activities, the Boy Scouts of America has developed *Climb On Safely* as its recommended procedure for Scouting units conducting BSA climbing and rappelling activities at a natural site or a specifically designed facility such as a climbing wall or tower. Patterned after the successes of the BSA's Safe Swim Defense plan and Safety Afloat, *Climb On Safely* establishes the guidelines by which BSA unit climbing and rappelling activities are to be directed, and lays out the standards for equipment, sites, methods, supervision, and safety.

By comparison, the BSA's *Topping Out* manual addresses the needs of district, council, and unit climbing and rappelling activities. It is the BSA's most comprehensive publication on relevant aspects of climbing and rappelling. The manual may be a valuable resource for unit leaders in complying with *Climb On Safely* guidelines.

This manual is not intended to address every climbing/rappelling situation. For climbing and rappelling, the recommended reference is the seventh edition of *Mountaineering: The Freedom of the Hills*, edited by Don Graydon and Kurt Hanson. For caving, the recommended reference is *On Rope*, by Bruce Smith and Allen Padgett.



*Climb On Safely* establishes the guidelines for effectively and safely managing BSA unit climbing and rappelling activities.

# Chapter 1

## Standards and Inspections

The National Council of the Boy Scouts of America has developed the standards and inspection procedures detailed in this chapter to help ensure the highest degree of health and safety for participants and staff members engaged in climbing and rappelling activities conducted by BSA districts and councils.

### **Frequency of Inspections**

- National standards are revised annually, and the frequency and type of inspections must follow the current climbing national standards.
- All council or district climbing/rappelling activities—whether or not they are a part of a district activity, a summer camp, or a council high-adventure operation—must follow these standards and will be inspected accordingly.
- Climbing/rappelling activities may be inspected at times other than scheduled national resident-camp visitations.

THE COPE/CLIMBING  
VISITATION TEAM IS EMPOWERED  
TO INSPECT THE FACILITIES  
AND ACTIVITIES OF CLIMBING  
AND RAPPELLING PROGRAMS AND  
OF PROJECT COPE COURSES.

