

HUMAN ERROR

Anne Salisbury Senior Inspector, Adventure Activities Licensing Service

Several incidents, none serious, but with the potential to be more serious, have been observed by, or reported to inspectors in the last year or so. We are all subject to human error in one form or another during a career in the outdoors, so I thought a recent incident was worth reporting here.

Two instructors were working with a small group of adults at a single pitch crag. A change had to be made to the anticipated location of the abseil due to local conditions, and an abseil was instead rigged from a ledge sited just below the crag top, for the pre-arranged start time.

One instructor set up the semi static rigging rope at the top of the crag, back from the edge, and the second instructor set up the abseil station at the ledge about half way down.

The adults abseiled and all was fine as far as they were concerned.

At the end of the session the instructors returned to the top to de-rig the rope and found that the rigging rope had been rubbing over the edge and had worn through the whole sheath at one point, though none of

the core fibres were damaged. The safety rope had been rigged to other anchors and was not affected.

Neither instructor checked the other's work as there was a level of mutual trust, and no rope protectors were used, as these were not normally needed for the 'usual' abseil place.

No one was hurt or injured, and the safety rope was separately anchored, however, it seems clear that this incident could have been prevented.

1. Ropes rubbing, and protection for the same, is a given fundamental.
2. When working with other qualified staff, it seems sensible to cast an eye over others' work, to pick up any potential problems, just as we do when climbing with friends and setting up an abseil.
3. Plan Bs or alternative sites or venues may need extra equipment or a change in style of rigging.
4. If local circumstances dictate a change in plan, instructors may feel pressurised into setting up an alternative within a given time scale. Maybe better to have a late start or even cancel the activity.

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