

Multi-Pitch Climbing Trip Leader Standards

1. Introduction

The skills and guidelines in this document are intended to provide standards for the **“mountain skills”** needed to be a successful CMC technical trip leader for this activity. These skills are in addition to those outlined the CMC Trip Leader Manual.

2. Scope and Terrain

Multi-Pitch climbs do not exceed commitment grade III or include a planned overnight stay. Climbs may contain short sections of third and/or fourth class terrain. Approaches and/or descents to these climbs do not include other notable navigational challenges or terrain challenges.

3. Training and Experience

Training. CMC Traditional Lead Climbing School, Ice Lead School, Multi Pitch Self Rescue (or equivalent), Advanced Multi Pitch.

The CMC recognizes that there are many avenues to climbing education, such as informal mentorship, professional instruction, or volunteer peer-based instruction (via organizations like the CMC, Mountaineers, Mazamas, etc.). Candidates that meet these activity standards are encouraged to become Tech Trip Leaders, too.

Experience.

- Candidates typically have at least one year of multi-pitch climbing experience in a variety of terrain
- Candidates are confident leading traditional climbs of at least 5.5 rock or WI3 at the time of assessment.
- Candidates have led or shared lead on a minimum of thirty multi-pitch climbs; fifteen of these climbs are graded 5.5 or WI3 or harder. The proportion of multi pitch ice climbs that satisfy the experience requirement shall be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

Assessment. Candidates are evaluated by experienced CMC mentors according to these standards. The skill set is the same as for single pitch climbing, with a few exceptions. Assessment will focus on managing belay stances, rope handling, and transitions. While rigorous assessment of technical skills is a focus of the technical LIT, managing group dynamics is also an important part of the overall assessment. Candidates who lack experience managing groups may enroll in a Wall Leader School to get some exposure.

4. Skills and Knowledge

Multi-Pitch Climbing Leaders are expected to demonstrate proficiency in executing and applying the skills and knowledge listed below.

Climbing Movement. When climbing and placing protection, Leaders are fluid, effective, and efficient on on-sight leads of routes of at least 5.6 in difficulty. They are versed in climbing on a variety of rock types and features.

Equipment. Leaders are knowledgeable about the variety of tools available to accomplish any relevant task, and their particular advantages and disadvantages. They appreciate the design, intended uses, and practical applications of each tool, and make selections and recommendations based on that knowledge. Equipment that Leaders are familiar with includes:

- fixed anchors (bolts, hangers, rappel rings, webbing, etc.)
- removable protection (cams, stoppers, tricams, etc.)
- ropes (i.e. static and dynamic)
- harnesses
- personal protective equipment (helmets, gloves, etc.)
- footwear
- hard goods (belay/rappel devices, carabiners, etc.)
- soft goods (slings, cord, tethers, etc.)

Leaders also display an understanding of non-climbing-specific outdoors equipment used on climbing outings. The leader will, for example, choose an appropriate pack for any given excursion. The contents of this pack will vary based on the venue but may include emergency supplies (first aid kit, headlamp, etc.), human waste disposal kit, communication devices, navigational aids, additional food and layers, and other items.

Leaders ensure equipment is reasonably suitable for its intended use.

Rope Management, Knots, and Hitches. Leaders proficiently manage rope with single and double rope systems, including when using caterpillar, parallel, or end-roping techniques and during transitions, by keeping organized workspaces and managing the ends of the rope. Belay systems manage slack appropriately to secure climbers and mitigate fall consequences.

Leaders have a mastery of the knots and hitches most prevalent in multi-pitch climbing:

Knots	Hitches
Overhand on a Bight	Clove
BHK	Autoblock
Flat Overhand	Prusik
Figure-Eight Follow-Through	Klemheist

Figure Eight on a Bight	Basket
Bowline	Girth
Bowline with a Bight	Munter
Double Fisherman's	
Barrel	
Mule	
Water	

Protection Systems and Anchor Building. Leaders are versed in selecting, placing, and evaluating a variety of protection types (See “Equipment”), including terrain itself, in a wide array of climbing environments. They understand the general principles behind an item’s construction and functionality and common mechanisms of failure.

Leaders have a practical understanding of protection principles, the nature of forces- both theoretical and real- affecting the climbing system, and techniques for building sufficient systems and safeguarding the integrity of those systems, including the use of double checks. Leaders appreciate how a variety of factors from rope drag and user error to weather conditions and rock type can affect the functionality of equipment and systems. They are prepared to anticipate and manage possible factors.

Leaders construct strong, secure, and simple anchors. They adjust their construction based on their knowledge of the many factors affecting climbing systems. Additionally, Leaders are versed in building, inspecting, and replacing improvised anchors, including “tat” and “bail” anchors.

Belaying and Spotting. Leaders belay in a fundamentally sound manner. The principles of fundamentally sound belay mechanics are:

1. A brake hand must be maintained at all times.
2. Hand transitions should happen in the position of maximum friction.
3. The hands and limbs should be positioned ergonomically.

This is true whether they are belaying with terrain, a manual-, or assisted-braking device, from above or below, and with one or two ropes. Leaders employ direct belays in fifth class terrain for the follower(s) and can identify appropriate situations in which to do so for the leader. Leaders can belay and lower with plaque devices when the device is unweighted or weighted and loaded with one or two ropes. Leaders understand the need for vigilance, positioning, and the ability to anticipate changing belay needs.

Technical Descent. Leaders are knowledgeable about a variety of rappelling, lowering, and belayed downclimbing set-up, back-up, and transition strategies. Leaders can assess and use relevant strategies based on the situation, including extensions,

friction hitches, and back-up belays. Multi pitch ice leaders must be knowledgeable and proficient in constructing V-thread anchors for rappel descents.

Rescue and Assistance Skills. Multi-Pitch Climbing Leaders are familiar with the following skills:

- Load transfer
- Improvised systems for belay, rappel, and ascension
- Hauling (i.e. creating mechanical advantages sufficient for the task)
- Tandem rappelling, including transitions
- Use of the plaquette in emergency situations
- First aid and emergency medical care, including demonstrated skills in:
 - patient assessment, stabilization, and transport/evacuation
 - treatment of minor injuries and illnesses
 - communication and cooperation with advanced medical care

Climbing Communication. Leaders utilize communication techniques that accommodate a variety of environments and situations, including effective verbal and non-verbal strategies.

Objective and Terrain Identification. Leaders are adept at identifying appropriate objectives and terrain, including third and fourth class terrain. They are also aware of and manage environmental hazards, including altitude, lightning, water crossings, rock fall, exposure to elements and precipices, and flora and fauna hazards. Leaders' familiarity with a variety of route selection tools (e.g. online resources, guidebooks, and peer input) enables them to find desired climbs and/or undocumented but climbable features.