



Western Australian Adventure Activity Standard Challenge Ropes Courses

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Western Australian Adventure Activity Standards

Challenge Ropes Courses

Adventure Activity Standards benchmark the minimum industry requirements and responsibilities for organisations and leaders conducting outdoor adventure activities for commercial and non – commercial groups.

The Adventure Activity Standards are designed to be applied when the participants are, for the purposes of participating in the activity, either

- in a pre-existing group
 - where either the group members (and or its representative third party) have made a collective purchase of / collective decision to participate in the activity (ie a school, corporate or community group); or are
- formed into a new group
 - where the participants have purchased / made the decision to participate in the activity as individuals or smaller groups, but having done so become a part of a new group (ie citizens or tourists who, having purchased an activity from an organisation or leader individually, are formed into a group for the purposes of participating in the activity provided).

In all cases the relationship between the group of participants and the activity provider is one based upon dependence by way of contract and or duty of care.

The existence of other types of groups where the group is less defined and NOT dependent as a group upon an activity provider for the conduct of the activity is acknowledged. (ie independent club members participating in an activity). It is intended that such less defined groups of independent participants are not “captured” by the AAS.

The Western Australian Adventure Activity Standards were developed by an industry wide consultative process coordinated by Outdoors WA following the recommendations of the 2006 State Government Adventure Tourism Visitor Safety Task Force Report. The Project received grant funding via the Department of Sport and Recreation.

The development and implementation of the AAS allows the outdoor adventure industry to demonstrate its collective integrity and agreed standards. This, in turn will provide a measure of quality for the purposes of assisting

1. Consumers of our services to make informed choices about the services they select
2. Training organisations to produce graduates who understand and meet industry standards
3. Media, insurance and legal scrutineers of our industry and its members, to understand what is acceptable practice and what is not
4. The development of sustainable use practices that consider the specific natural and cultural heritage values of areas in which we conduct outdoor activities

The AAS are a critical component of the **industry quality framework** comprising four aligned and inter-connected components

1. **Accreditation** - the required business operating standards for businesses and organisations
2. **Adventure Activity Standards** - the minimum standards to which an activity must be conducted by a provider to dependent groups of participants
3. **Leader Registration Scheme** - the responsibilities and competencies required of the leaders conducting the outdoor activities
4. **Codes of Conduct** – the behavioural expectations of persons operating as outdoor leaders

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INTRODUCTION

The Western Australian Adventure Activity Standards (AAS) have been developed to assist organisations and leaders to plan and conduct outdoor adventure activities with commercial and non-commercial dependent groups of participants where there is a duty of care based in contract and or in authority.

The purpose of the AAS is to maintain the perception of adventure whilst simultaneously reducing / managing the real risk for participants. Increased outdoor physical activity with reduced incident and accident rates will be the ultimate performance indicators of the value of the AAS.

The AAS provide a valuable resource for the development of operating procedures, and or for the purposes of comparing existing operating procedures to industry agreed benchmarked standards. All groups differ in their collective skills and experience and in their degree of dependence upon the leader. They participate in outdoor activities at a range of sites with varying conditions (including weather). It therefore **remains the responsibility of the leader to make the professional judgements and decisions concerning the conduct of the activity to ensure the safety of the group**. The AAS are designed to assist such judgements and decision making.

The AAS are also designed to promote knowledge and awareness of the broad and activity specific impacts increasing recreation and travel opportunities place upon the natural environment. The AAS are designed to assist the protection of biodiversity values and the preservation of cultural sites balanced with the increased access demands. The 7 Principles of Leave No Trace are imbedded within the AAS.

Whilst not statutory standards, the AAS provide the basis for policy formation and decision making by jurisdictions external to the outdoor adventure activity industry including, but not restricted to, licensing, insurance and legal jurisdictions.

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION

(The AAS is not intended to apply to the construction and maintenance of the physical elements / structures comprising challenge ropes courses, as these standards are covered by other jurisdictions and or organisations including the Association for Challenge Course Technology Australia (ACCTA) and Standards Australia).

A challenge ropes course may comprise elements or physical structures (other than abseiling, rock climbing, artificial climbing structures or bouldering walls), participation on which requires spotting and / or belaying on high and / or low elements which are often used as part of an experiential learning program. Adventure games have been included in this AAS because they are often used in conjunction with challenge ropes course instruction as group preparation exercises and because some adventure games also require spotting.

- **Adventure Games** – activities which are not identifiable as elements of high or low ropes courses but which require spotting to ensure participant safety
- **Low Ropes Course Elements** – elements of challenge ropes courses within 2 metres of the ground and where participant safety (in particular the head and upper body) can be provided by “spotting” rather than with the aid of additional systems involving a harnesses and belay mechanism (note that the height above ground difference between the participant and the spotters, and the nature of the fall area, are additionally relevant determinants of “low” vs “high” elements)
- **High Ropes Course Elements** – elements of challenge ropes courses above 2 metres of the ground (and or beyond the criteria of “low elements”) where participant safety (in particular the head and upper body) can NOT be provided by “spotting” and so requires a system involving a harnesses and belay mechanism.

Further details of Challenge Ropes Courses operating procedures can be found in the Western Australian Roping Activities Code of Practice located at www.outdoorswa.org

PLANNING and PREPARATION

The AAS provides a planning and preparation framework considered critical in maximising participant safety and enjoyment. All planning must be finalised and the relevant components written before the activity is undertaken. A suggested framework for the activity plan includes

- Preliminary Information
- Site Plan
- Risk Management Plan
- Emergency Response Plan
- Minimal Environmental Impact Plan

Samples and suggested templates are available at www.outdoorswa.org

Preliminary Information

The following are the minimum information requirements for conducting a Challenge Ropes Courses session

- Objectives / desired outcomes of the session (recommended only)
- Planned start and finish times
- Leader to participant ratio and group size (refer Leader : Participant Ratios and Group Size)
- Land/site manager requirements including
 - access restrictions
 - group sizes
 - booking and permit requirements
 - current environmental management policies and biodiversity issues affecting the region (refer to www.dec.wa.gov.au)
 - regulations in regard to fire restrictions and bans
- Equipment requirements (refer Equipment)
- Participants' names and emergency contact details
- Medical information advised by participants and or the activity provider (to the outdoor leader) which may be relevant to / impact upon the safe conduct of the activity
 - Conditions - asthma, diabetes, epilepsy, fainting, allergic reactions, blood conditions which may effect bleeding/ blood clotting, recent or long-standing injuries, (eg back, knee, ankle), disability, pregnancy, repetitive strain injury
 - Medications - what is it / why is it required / how is it administered?
- Group members are advised in writing of
 - Potential risks associated with the activity
 - Zero tolerance requirements re alcohol and drugs other than prescription drugs NOT effecting the participant's ability to participate
 - The requirement to conform to responsible and attentive behaviour
- Participant signed legal liability disclaimer (informed consent) / waiver to sue / authorisation to seek / provide emergency medical treatment (retain for a time frame as dictated by the Statute of Limitations Act 2005); dependent participants under the age of 18 must have the signature of a parent / guardian if required by the organisation that has legal responsibility for them
- A copy of a formal risk assessment and maintenance inspection report conducted within the last 12 months attesting to the maintenance and servicing of all equipment in accordance with manufacturer's and / or constructor's specifications
- An understanding of the history of the site

Site Plan

The purpose of the site plan is to assess issues re access, environmental impact, risk and emergency communications relative to a particular site. The site plan ought to provide details of

- pre-activity inspection of all aspects of the specific elements to be used including

- surrounding area and ground (eg. fallen branches)
- physical structures (eg. trees and poles)
- materials and fittings (eg. wires and bolts)
- safety equipment (eg. ropes and harnesses)
- access to the site
 - assessment of the suitability of the site for the size of the group
 - access to and within the site
 - by vehicle (2WD / 4WD) including emergency services vehicles
 - on foot including to and from the nearest car park and to and from the site and its elements including the best routes to take to minimise environmental impact
- how to make an emergency call (by mobile or satellite phone, by radio or by a runner party to a land line) and where is the best place to make these calls
- surface type & suitability (vegetation, rocks, tree roots, etc.)
- site characteristics (difficulty, height, line of sight, designated “safe” areas)
- element construction to ensure minimal environmental impact
- element construction to allow for participant rescue
- opportunities for rest breaks and availability of impacted shaded waiting areas
- merits of taking alternative removable shelter to prevent the destruction of vegetation by groups looking for shade
- toileting facilities and appropriate waste disposal options
- location of any water sources
- location of any culturally significant areas, structures, artefacts or rock art that need to be avoided
- location of any rare or endangered plants or animals
- ability of site to withstand visitation with minimal impact including leaving vegetation undisturbed

Samples and suggested templates are available at www.outdoorswa.org

Risk Management Plan

The purpose of the Risk Management Plan is to identify the human, site specific, equipment and environmental risks for the safe conduct of the activity. By identifying, analysing and evaluating these risks, appropriate strategies to reduce / manage the risk can be developed and implemented.

The activity provider must assess the chosen site(s) for any hazards and adapt the planning of the activity as required. Information of any new hazard ought to be made available within the group / organisation and to the relevant land manager.

Samples and suggested templates are available at www.outdoorswa.org

The Risk Management Plan ought to consider

- Leader(s) have the required authorisation, skills, qualifications and experience to
 - conduct the activity elements on the selected course
 - satisfy the planned objectives
 - effectively manage incidents including rescue of participants from elements of the course (refer Requirements of Leaders)
 - preserve the environmental integrity of the activity site and surrounding area
- Leader : Participant ratio (refer Participant Ratios and Group Size)
- Group profile
 - Skill / experience levels
 - Needs / requirements
 - Knowledge of environmental minimum impact strategies
- Methods for managing the group at all times
 - Participants and belayers / spotters
 - Others waiting to participate
 - Others who have completed their participation

Emergency Response Plan

The purpose of the Emergency Response Plan is to provide a set of steps for leaders to follow in the event of an incident or emergency which may include or lead to injury or death. The plan must detail how to minimise the escalation of the situation, the injuries incurred and how to reduce the likelihood of further incidents occurring. The Emergency Response Plan must be site specific and maintain current details including

- Access and egress options including details of routes to take and their anticipated times
- Contingency plans for effective rescue with minimum environmental impact to the site
- Group assembly points
- Emergency contact details including
 - Police
 - Land Owner / Course Manager
 - Medical stations (hospital, doctor)
- Specific communication requirements / available networks

ALL leaders must carry a copy and be fully aware of the emergency response plan. A copy of the emergency response plan must also be kept (with other documentation) with a non-participating contact and be readily accessible by the leader via an available telecommunication method in the event of an incident / emergency.

The leader is to communicate with the relevant external contact at a designated time(s). Upon failure to do so the external contact must action the emergency response plan which may include contacting the police. In situations where there is only one leader, the emergency response plan ought to have been introduced to, and be available to members of the group so that it may be actioned in the event that the leader becomes unfit to do so.

Samples and suggested templates are available at www.outdoorswa.org

Leader: Participant Ratios and Group Size

Whilst it is acknowledged that the characteristics profile of the group, the purposes of the activity, the characteristics of the site and the experience of the leader will influence the ratios of leaders to participants, the minimum ratios considered acceptable are

▪ Low Ropes Courses and Adventure Games Requiring Spotting – 2 spotters per participant

Operational Ratio – applicable for registered leaders to actual dependent participants 1:12

Operational Ratio – applicable for registered leaders with additional responsible adult (who has had sufficient training to assist in breaking) to actual dependent participants 1:1:18

▪ Low Ropes Courses and Adventure Games Requiring Spotting – 4 spotters per participant

Operational Ratio – applicable for registered leaders to actual dependent participants 1:20

Operational Ratio – applicable for registered leaders with additional responsible adult (who has had sufficient training to assist in breaking) to actual dependent participants 1:1:30

▪ High Ropes Courses

Operational Ratio – applicable for registered leaders to actual dependent participants 1:9

Operational Ratio – applicable for registered leaders with additional assistant conductor to actual dependent participants 1:1:18

These ratios are the minimum ratios. It is understood that different jurisdictions may impose ratios tighter than those above for reasons based within their own jurisdictions.

Group size will be determined by both site characteristics and the application of the above ratios. Site specific characteristics, including distance between elements, line of site between elements and sound carriage between elements will also influence group size and ratios.

Minimal Environmental Impact Plan

1. Plan Ahead and Prepare*

- Choose shaded waiting areas, not only for the comfort of participants, but also to reduce the tendency for waiting participants to push back into surrounding vegetation to find shade

2. Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces*

- If there is no alternative to using trees or other vegetation for belay points, protect them from rope damage by using rope padding or a minimum of 50 cm thick webbing
- Protect all plants, animals, historical and archaeological sites and geographic features
- Utilise recognised tracks to approach and move between descents
- Avoid steep access and ascent tracks which will be more prone to erosion
- Manage groups to minimise disturbance to vegetation and erosion
- Do not brush moss or lichen from the cliff unless absolutely necessary for safety reasons
- Avoid the use of pitons for protection
- Do not fix materials including canvas and carpet to tree roots

3. Dispose of Wastes Properly*

- Where there are no facilities, bury faecal matter at least 100 metres from any waterway
- Carry out all rubbish, including foodstuffs as they may harm native wildlife
- Dispose of washing water at least 100 metres from any waterway
- Avoid leaving food scraps that encourage the habituation of native animals

4. Leave What You Find*

- Wash all soil from camping and personal equipment and vehicles before moving between locations to avoid transporting seeds or soil-borne pathogens such as Phytophthora
- Avoid altering vegetation to set up adventure games

5. Minimise Campfire Impacts*

- Observe Total Fire Bans and seasonal restrictions; liaise with local land management staff

6. Respect Wildlife*

- Try to minimise noise at the activity site
- Minimise interaction with wildlife including feeding
- Be aware of the nesting and behaviour patterns of wildlife found at the site

7. Consider Your Hosts and Other Visitors*

- Do not block footpaths with equipment, spotters or belayers
- Be aware of and diplomatic with other groups
- Respect the wishes and regulations of all hosts – indigenous, pastoral, land managers and locals

Further information is available at Leave No Trace Australia www.lnt.org.au

REQUIREMENTS OF LEADERS

The performance of the leader is a critical factor in the safe conduct of a Challenge Ropes Course activity. The leader is required to

- accept responsibility for the planning, preparation and conduct of the activity
- maintain current qualifications and experience deemed to be critical determinants of the ability to meet these requirements
- accept responsibility for the environmental preservation of the site and surrounding area

This does not exclude the fact that participants are responsible for their own actions in relation to the potential risks that may be encountered by choosing to participate in the activity.

For Challenge Ropes Courses leaders may be described as

- a “**Supervisor**” – a leader suitably qualified to conduct a group independently
- a “**Conductor**” – a leader suitably qualified to assist a supervisor to conduct a group

- an “Assistant” – a responsible adult person who does not conduct the activities but who is familiar with components of the operating procedures and can thus assist qualified leaders

Responsibilities of Leaders

Leaders are required to accept the following responsibilities

- to use professional judgement to make decisions that will ensure the safety of all group members and maintain the integrity of the environment including matters relevant to
 - people based risks*
 - interpret / manage all participant information (including medical and other characteristics) relevant to the safe conduct of the activity including forms signed by all participants, parents or guardians
 - communicate the risks relating to the activity to the group in a pre-activity briefing
 - match the experience / capabilities of the group to the activity / challenge ropes course elements
 - ensure all incidents are documented and reported
 - close down the activity in circumstances where dependent participants fail or refuse to comply with requirements (EG behavioural, equipment use)
 - site based risks*
 - appropriately manage hazards including trees, rocks etc
 - be aware of and comply with the land/site manager’s guidelines including minimal impact
 - manage the whole group effectively; ensure that your group behaves with respect for other users
 - ensure that all waiting participants remain in a designated safe area and, if minors, are appropriately supervised by a responsible adult
 - appoint appropriate external contacts to notify police etc. if not contacted by designated time/s
 - notify appropriate external contacts of safe return / completion
 - equipment based risks*
 - check suitability, condition and use of all equipment prior to, during and on return
 - ensure correct use of equipment by all participants
 - use all equipment in keeping with manufacturer’s and ropes course constructor’s specifications
 - ensure that a First Aid Kit and communication equipment suitable for the location are in good order and present at the activity
 - environmental based risks*
 - apply Leave No Trace Principles
 - comply with the land / site manager’s guidelines including minimal impact principles relative to flora, fauna and rubbish removal
 - report all environmental damage to the Department of Environment and Conservation or other land manager
 - report any perceived breaches of the Challenge Ropes Courses AAS or the Roping Activities Code of Practice to Outdoors WA

**** to be read and applied in conjunction with additional details in the Western Australian Roping Activities Code of Practice***

Competencies of Leaders

Leaders require a range of technical and group facilitation skills to effectively conduct group abseiling activities. Leaders are deemed to be competent to lead Challenge Ropes Course activities if

- they are currently registered in the National Outdoor Leader Registration Scheme (NOLRS)* as a Challenge Ropes Course Conductor, Manager or Supervisor (NOLRS - administered by Outdoors WA on behalf of the Outdoor Council of Australia) which requires
 - a recognised qualification
 - sufficient current experience

- appropriate first aid qualifications
 - within one hour from definitive medical care – Senior First Aid required
 - beyond one hour from definitive medical care – an advanced / wilderness / remote First Aid qualification is required

*** registration with NOLRS must be achieved by 31 January 2011**

*** further information about NOLRS including how to register is available at www.outdoorswa.org**

*** the registration achieved must align with the specific form of Challenge Ropes Courses to be undertaken ie. High Ropes Course Conductor**

EQUIPMENT

Equipment requirements vary with the objectives of the activity, the group characteristic profile and the environmental conditions likely to be endured. When planning equipment requirements for a session it is important to consider all possible eventualities and to select equipment that will minimise cultural and environmental impact of the activity (refer www.LNT.org.au). All equipment must be used, stored and maintained in accordance with the manufacturer's specifications. A usage and maintenance log of all equipment must be maintained by the owner / manager of the challenge ropes course.

Participant's Equipment*

The following equipment requirements apply to all dependent participants undertaking High Ropes Course activities

- Helmet specifically designed for Challenge Ropes Courses / abseiling and which adheres to UIAA, CE, ANSI or equivalent must be worn whenever there is a risk of falling objects
- Harness specifically manufactured for Challenge Ropes Courses / abseiling and which adheres to UIAA, CE or equivalent; must be used in accordance with manufacturers' specifications
- # Clothing appropriate to the requirements of the site and weather conditions
- Sturdy, enclosed footwear (to be worn while accessing the site also)
- Participant's personal medication
- Gloves whilst belaying
- All equipment must be used in accordance with the manufacturers' specifications

also applies to participants engaging low ropes course activities

Leader's Equipment*

The following equipment requirements, in addition to those listed above, apply to leaders conducting dependant group High Ropes Course activities

- Knife suitable for cutting ropes in emergency situations (preferably on a lanyard)
- Whistle
- Spare sling
- A rescue pack of pulleys, prusik loops or ascenders, and a belay device should be accessible for appropriate rescue

Group Equipment*

The following equipment is required for all dependant group High Ropes Course activities

- Ropes course with construction that meets the Australian Standard as certified by an engineer OR approved by ACCTA inclusive of annual engineer / arborist sign off (owner of course to maintain maintenance logs)
- Ropes and all protective equipment (karabiners, slings, belay devices and chocks) which adhere to UIAA, CE, ANSI or equivalent must be manufactured specifically for Challenge Ropes Courses / abseiling and used according to the manufacturer's specifications and accepted practice
- Appropriate belay devices including locking karabiner

- Emergency communication equipment (mobile phone, radio, PLB if in remote area etc.)
- A First Aid Kit appropriate for the level of training completed and the size of the group
- Tools for proper waste disposal (ie trowel if necessary)
- Equipment to clean footwear, tyres, hardware and ropes in areas affected by soil borne pathogens such as phytophthora

**to be read and applied in conjunction with additional details in the Western Australian Roping Activities Code of Practice*

DEFINITION OF TERMS

- **Activity Provider** – an entity, person or group of persons assuming the role of providing the activity (the activity provider) for a group of dependent persons for a specific commercial or not – for – profit purpose
- **Dependent Group / Participant** – a group or individual within a group whose welfare associated with participating in the activity is in part the responsibility of the leader; who is dependent upon the leader for their safe participation in the activity which may be so deemed by law or contract
- **Outdoor Leader** - term for an individual accepting the roles of leading and managing the outdoor activity; can be a Challenge Ropes Course Conductor, Manager or Supervisor as defined in the National Outdoor Leader Registration Scheme (NOLRS); can be paid or voluntary; must be a registered leader in NOLRS
- **Competency** - minimum industry agreed standard of skill and knowledge necessary for a specific activity being conducted at a specific level
- **Assistant Conductor / Responsible Adult** – adult person deemed, by the outdoor leader, as adequately capable of accepting responsibility for selected aspects of the management of the group and or its participants in conjunction with the safe conduct of the activity; who has the ability to supervise and ensure clearly defined belaying and spotting practices of participants as well as manage and control participants not directly involved with the activity
- **Ropes Course Manager** – term for an individual who has the current knowledge, skills and experience to manage and maintain a challenge ropes course as defined in the National Outdoor Leader Registration Scheme (NOLRS); can be paid or voluntary; must be a registered leader in NOLRS
- **UIAA** – Union Internationale des Associations d’Alpinisme
- **CE** – European Community
- **ANSI** – American National Standards Institute
- **Belay** - technique of controlling the rope so that a falling climber does not fall very far. This task is assigned to a belayer. The term belay is also used to mean the place where the belayer is anchored. Control of the rope is achieved through applying friction, which allows control of the speed at which the rope slides past the belayer. This friction is generally achieved by forcing the rope through tight bends and past rough surfaces. Belaying is a critical part of the climbing system. By using a correct belaying method, the belayer can hold the entire weight of the climber by using relatively little force, and can easily arrest even a long fall. By using a mixture of belaying angle and hand-grip on the rope, a climber can be lowered gently by the belayer to a safe point where climbing can be resumed
- **Bouldering** - a style of rock climbing undertaken without a rope and normally limited to very short climbs so that a fall will not result in serious injury. Bouldering is a style of climbing emphasizing power, strength, and dynamics. Its focus is on individual moves or short sequences of moves. For protection, climbers typically put a bouldering mat (crash pad) on the ground to break their fall and have one or more spotters, who work to direct the climber’s body toward the crash pad during a fall, while protecting the climber’s head from hazards
- **Spotting** - a technique used where participants are close to the ground and ropes are not used. The spotter stands below the participant, with arms raised or at the ready. If the participant falls, the spotter does not catch the participant but redirects the participant’s fall so that they land safely. At the very least the spotter ensures that the participant’s head and back do not strike the ground directly. If the participant jumps down, the spotter can also help prevent stumbles and injuries on uneven ground. When spotting you should always use "spoons" (all fingers together) because fingers can be broken if your fingers are spread apart. A spotter should always be used for accident prevention. A spotter will typically hold their arms up with hands in a supporting position for more or less vertical climbs. When the participant falls, the spotter’s hands lightly hold the participant’s hips or lower back, near their centre of gravity. This allows the spotter to help guide the participant’s fall effectively, helping them keep the centre of gravity over their feet. When on steeper, past vertical activities, the spotter will hold their arms out in a cradling position. If the participant were to

unexpectedly fall, the spotter supports the upper and middle back, helping the participant, land on their feet

- **Competency** - minimum industry agreed standard of skill and knowledge necessary for a specific activity being conducted at a specific level
- **Phytophthora** – Phytophthora Dieback: is a microscopic soil borne water mould that attacks plants. It impacts 40 percent of our native plant species and threatens whole communities including animal habitats. It is spread in the movement of infested water, soil or plant material. As the name water mould suggests, it requires moist conditions to thrive. Its food source is the root and basal stem tissue of living plants. It is currently the biggest threat to biodiversity in Australia and it is spread extensively by human activity. More information is available online at www.dieback.net.au
- **ACCTA** – Association of Challenge Course Technology Australia

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Adventure Activity Standards initially developed by The Outdoor Recreation Centre in Victoria proved to be an invaluable resource in the development of the Western Australian Adventure Activity Standard for Challenge Ropes Courses.

FEEDBACK, REVIEW & APPEALS

The AAS are designed to be 'living' standards with feedback, requests for review and/or appeal against aspects of a standard considered to be healthy part of the development process, one that will ensure the currency & relevancy of the standards. Feedback, requests for review and/or appeals will be managed by the Industry Standards Panel. Details and proformas are available at www.outdoorswa.org / industry quality framework / Industry Standards Panel.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Contact Outdoors WA for further information or to obtain contact details of the organisations conducting Challenge Ropes Courses activities and training.

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