

## THE TRAINING OFFICERS ROLE IN SSS.

*Chris Curtis.*

I have been the Training Officer of SSS for about eight years now. The funny thing is I never actually put my hand up for the role. One day I just received an email saying, *You're our new training officer.*

So I accepted the challenge and got on with the job. It has certainly been interesting and I am always learning.

Our training is very different to a workplace. Normally everyone is required to meet certain requirements to pass, it is more formal and people receive a certificate on completion.

Our training is much more relaxed (Photo 1). There are no certificates and everyone has their own goals of how much they want to learn. There are no club minimum requirements for the level of SRT skills.

My role as Safety and Training Officer includes a lot of duties (Photo 2) including, but not limited to:

- Organising & running of training days.
- Arranging equipment.
- Setting up of rope exercises.
- Supervision of exercises.
- Leadership and mentoring.
- Education.
- Assist with gear recommendations and purchases.
- Develop and maintain training material.
- Establish the effectiveness of training.
- Provide a duty of care.

I have always been an advocate of sticking to facts and if you state something, you need to be able to back it up with those facts. Everyone has an opinion, but you can't argue with facts. This is even more critical in my training officer role. If I state something that is my personal opinion, I will clearly state that. I need to be able to put my personal opinions to the side as much as possible and maintain a non-biased view.

### **Equipment**

It's important to remember that each device has to comply with certain regulatory standards such as AS (for Australian Standards) and EN (for European Standards).

Then there's individual requirements for places of work use. For example, Industrial Abseilers can only use devices which comply to the required standards. Workplaces, rescue squads, etc can put many restrictions on equipment such as:

- Not allowed to use non-braking descenders or only allowing certain descenders.
- Not permitted to use ropes of less than 11mm and below 40 kN breaking strain.
- All carabiners must be auto locking.
- Must use a certain harness.

The restrictions will vary from country to country as well. This is a huge topic in itself and I am only scratching the surface.

A good example of the above is in Australia there has been a big push for everyone to use the same harness for industrial abseiling and rescue. I can't remember which harness, but I think it was the Petzl BOD FAST. NSW Cave Rescue was also being pushed and after some trialling, we pushed back as the harness was too cumbersome and inefficient for caving related rescue as we have to negotiate tight and twisty squeezes, plus durability was a concern.

Recreational use of equipment is however not regulated. We don't have anyone telling us what we can and cannot use. We have all the freedom in the world to use different equipment in almost anyway we feel. There is even equipment that is designed purely for recreational use. The biggest thing we need to be careful of is using equipment within the manufacturers specifications for any given item.

There are more types of descenders and belay devices than ever on the market now, some designed specifically for rescue or even task specific. Racks and bobbins are still the main types of descenders used in recreational caving. Some brands produce bobbin style descenders in both braking and non-braking versions.

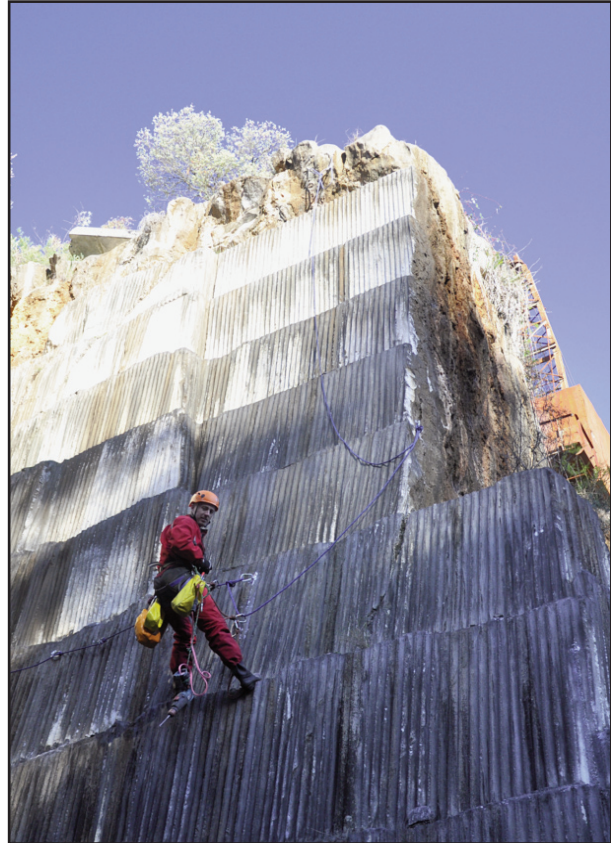
There is quite a lot of controversy and even contention over what is the best descender to



**Photo 1:** Special moments when I get to do what I love with my Dad.  
**Photo:** *Unknown.*



**Photo 2:** Chris putting in some bolts in the Olympian Cavern, Wombeyan Caves, 5-9-2017. **Photo:** *Peter Bauer.*



**Photo 3:** Cave Rescue training - Chris putting in temporary bolts at the old mine, Wombeyan Caves, 13-7-2013.  
**Photo:** *Rod Burton.*

use in caving and more so of whether to use an assisted braking or non-assisted braking descender. Some countries will favour one device over another as well as techniques and knots used. So there will never be a clear cut answer to, *What is the best?*

It will also depend on what you intend to use the device for. Every item or technique will have its pro's and con's, its own features and uses. That's where people like me come in. It's my duty of care to advise of those pro's and con's. This can take a lot of careful research and can be difficult as I don't have the opportunity to physically test and use every type of item.

When I first started caving I used a rack as I already had one for canyoning. Then I joined up with the NSW Cave Rescue Squad (Photo 3) and one of the criteria was that we had to use the Petzl Stop. Once I learned more about what it could be used for and how those uses applied to me, it soon became my preferred device recreationally, not just used for rescue. If I didn't join the NSW Cave Rescue Squad I could still be using the rack today or maybe

some other device. This is just one example of how use influences choice.

I certainly don't push anyone to use the Petzl Stop, I just show them what the Petzl Stop can do compared to a non-braking descender. The Petzl Stop is not a perfect device, but it works for me. This also applies to any other devices or techniques.

**Conclusion**

At the end of the day it is up to the individual to decide which devices they want to spend their hard earned cash on.

My role as training officer is to provide as much factual information as possible to allow someone to make the most informed decision possible. That way people do not later regret buying the wrong gear. I also don't want people to come back to me later after a purchase and say, *You didn't tell me about this issue...*

I hope this has given some insight into my role and the responsibilities that come with it.

*JSSS*